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DRAGON

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DRAGON
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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

3 **Editorial: D&D Future**

By Christopher Perkins & Greg Bilsland

The submission window is now open, and here's what we'd like to see: more *Dragonlance* proposals. No, really.

4 **Howl at the Moon**

By Robert J. Schwalb

Lycanthropy isn't so much a "curse" as a rockin' good excuse to tear your enemies to pieces with fangs and claws. Introducing new character themes for hirsute characters

15 **Lil' Flame: Fold-Up Dragon**

By Emi Tanji

And now for something a little different: a cute, fold-up paper dragon modeled after *Dungeon's* magazine classic red dragon villain, Flame.

16 **Bazaar of the Bizarre: Thingamajigs of the Barrier Peaks**

By David Chalker

Nothing good ever came out of the Barrier Peaks . . . until now. If you're ready to introduce futuristic alien weaponry to your campaign, this article is for you.

23 **Confessions of a Full-Time Wizard**

By Shelly Mazzanoble

R&D's "Player-in-Chief" lets loose her inner geek.

27 **Eye on the Realms: The Talking Door**

By Ed Greenwood

An otherwise unremarkable inn door has answers to some of the greatest mysteries and riddles in Waterdeep, but some believe its whispers are nothing but a prank.

31 **Eye on Dark Sun: Vaults of the Father and Master**

By Rodney Thompson

The treasure vault of Tectuktitlay in Draj is a shining example of what a mad sorcerer-king will do to keep his hoard from falling into unworthy hands.

34 **Eye on Eberron: The Bloodsail Principality**

By Keith Baker

The cold and inhospitable island of Farlnen is home to the Grim Lords and their crimson-sailed fleet. Unless you're a vampire or an agent of Vol, approach at your own risk.

38 **D&D Alumni**

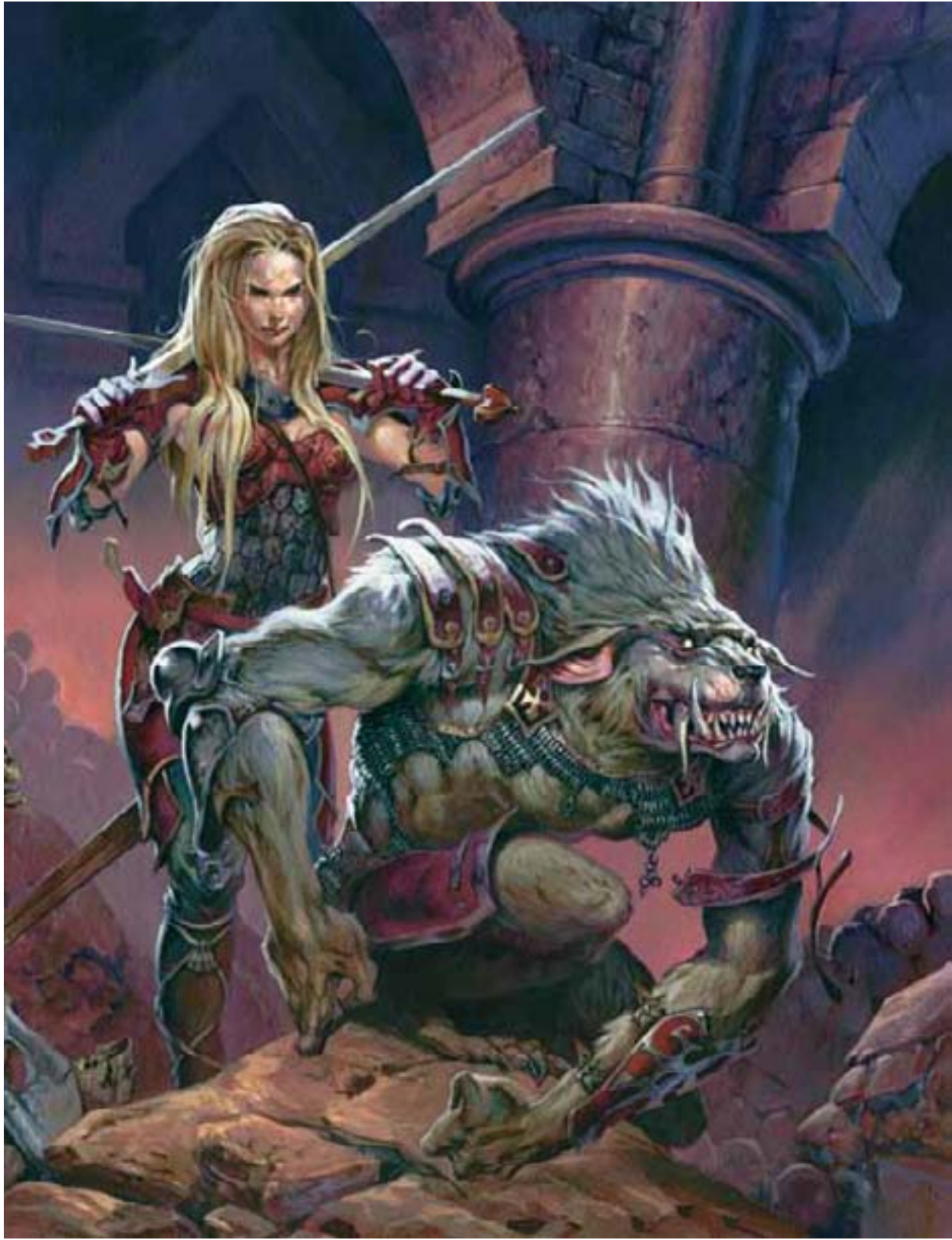
By Bart Carroll

Take a trip through past editions of the D&D game, and see how its iconic features have evolved over the decades.

42 **D&D Outsider**

By Jared von Hindman

When I heard the announcement that *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos* would be coming out, my brain read it as "Heroes of the Totally Bad Place Full of Demons and Fire that Looks Like Ice but Melts You Like Acid but They're Totally Still Heroes Even Though They Have Demon Blood and/or are Made of Living Blood Rock (Made of Lightning)." But I don't have to tell you that. We all had that moment, right?



Editorial:
D&D Future

By Christopher Perkins

Illustration by Kalman Andrasofszky

Guess what? It's April 1st! That means the article submission window is now OPEN. If you have a pitch for an article or adventure, we want to see it. If you have more than one, batch them together under one email and send it along. But before you do, please take the time to review our writer's guidelines. We've seen proposals from people who don't bother to read our submission guidelines, and the results are never pretty.

We've all but locked down our 2012 article and adventure content, so we're really looking for D&D stuff to fill our 2013 issues. Although your ideas don't need to match perfectly with the themes we have in mind (we do publish quite a lot of off-theme content), it might help to know what themes are tentatively planned for next year. Assuming the world doesn't end this year as the Mayans predicted, we're looking at the following themes in the first half of 2013, provided we get enough content to support them:

D&D Cartoon: To celebrate Hasbro's imminent reimagining of the classic Dungeons & Dragons® cartoon series, we'd like to showcase some of the coolest elements of the old show. Anyone want to tackle the Ecology of the Unicorn? Anyone? *Bueller?*

D&D Gamma World: Our limited D&D Gamma World® product line made a big radioactive splash last year, and the game is 4th Edition compatible. We think our subscribers are ready for more D&D Gamma World support.

Magic Crossover: Hasbro *loves* it when we mix-and-match our core brands, and folks have talked about a Magic: The Gathering® *Monster Manual* for years. Although that product never panned out, one can imagine lots of awesome article possibilities.

Dragonlance: Frankly, we're sick to death of the Forgotten Realms. We'd love to provide more support for the Dragonlance® campaign setting, but we get so few proposals.

This month's theme, by the way, is "the moon and the stars," which explains a lot of the fun stuff we're publishing this month in Dragon and Dungeon. For inspiration, we turned to module S3 *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*, by Gary Gygax, which proved—like it or not—that laser rifles and androids have a place in D&D.

The last day for article and adventure proposals is May 31st, after which the submission window will be closed until October, so don't delay! We look forward to seeing your wonderful and wacky ideas.

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Howl at the Moon

By Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations by Beth Trott, Eva Widermann, Ben Wootten, Jesper Ejsing

In every mortal, the unreasoning and monstrous nature of a beast strains against morality, virtue, and civilization. Most control the darkness by clinging to religion, philosophy, or a moral code. Under certain circumstances, such as when under great strain or terrible pressure, the anger breaks free and only violence can sate the beast.

Civilization provides a harbor for those seeking to escape the world of hunger and want. Behind steep walls, on streets watched by constables, and when tucked in warm beds, mortals tell themselves the darkness is out there, somewhere, held at bay by enlightenment's advance. Yet evil casts a long shadow. It never remains content with the gains it makes, and it seeks to creep across the landscape, spreading ruin, death, despair, and suffering to anything it touches. Evil goads the beast. It weakens the chains. It defeats reason. And when it takes hold, the monster breaks free and tragedy follows.

The tension between the rustic world and the urban one is alive and well, and dangers aplenty abound in both. From the mythical dragons soaring through fire-scorched clouds to the glistening horrors bubbling up from the Underdark's depths, most evils reveal themselves in their horrific or terrifying visages. Yet some evils reflect the darkness within mortals. These evils might even hide behind human masks, moving unseen through those havens where mortals think themselves safe. These dreadful threats are, perhaps, the most insidious of all because they can be anyone, anywhere, at any time. They are the hidden threat and the menace stalking the streets. They are the lycanthropes, the skinchangers, and werebeasts. They have become lost to the monster and are now its slaves.

Most lycanthropes possess unremarkable appearances and can pass for any man or woman, though most lycanthropes also show some roughness around the edges. They might hold jobs and raise families, just as any other contributor to their communities. But they all carry a terrible secret that would see them exiled at best and destroyed at worst if the secret is exposed. The human forms they wear are masks that conceal a bestial nature they struggle to control.

Or so the stories go. This article goes beyond the *Monster Manual*® and *Monster Vault*™ books and explores lycanthropy from the player's perspective by going into detail about the myths and legends concerning skinchangers. Additionally, three new character themes allow you to play a werebear, wererat, or werewolf.

Children of Three Worlds

Lycanthropes stand in three worlds, yet they belong to none. In their humanoid forms, they can, though rarely do, live as other humans. They might form communities or adopt human ones, gather in tribes, tend herds, and do all the things one might expect. In their beast forms, though they are little different from the animals they resemble. Their unnatural hunger drives them to hunt under the full moon's light, prowling for the blood their unnatural appetite demands. They exist in both forms, yet are not fully

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comfortable in either. The true form—the form all lycanthropes prefer—is the form between: the perfect melding of human and beast.

The following entries are legends about the origin of werebeasts.

Melora's Children

One legend claims Melora created the werebeasts. They were her children and, as such, she showered them with her affection. To them she put a great charge: protect the world from all threats and preserve it for future generations. She then divided them into clans to watch over her other creations and to rule them as they saw fit.

Harmony existed for a time, yet war in the heavens drew Melora's eye from the world. She needed to safeguard her dominion and her children from the elemental host seeking to undo what had been done. The werebeasts made good on their ancient vows and fought against the invader as they had been taught. Yet the longer the war raged, the further Melora drifted, and many werebeasts began to believe she had abandoned them altogether.

In this dark time, the werewolf champion Fenris convinced his clan they should make a gift to Melora to appease what they thought was the cause for her absence: her anger at them. Perhaps a true prize, one worthy of her divinity, would bring her back among them once more. And so Fenris and his fellows climbed the highest mountain, and from the peak they leaped from cloud to cloud until they could reach the largest jewel in the heavens: the silvery moon that had so long entranced them. Fenris plucked the moon from the night sky and returned to the moot where the other werebeasts awaited. All was dark, the moon gone, and many feared they had angered the other gods. Yet when Fenris revealed his prize, they were pleased, knowing Melora would be with them soon.

SHIFTERS

Though lycanthropes can pass for human while in their humanoid forms, humans they are not. Even those werebeasts who temper their appetites for human flesh and live among humans peacefully reveal their true heritage in their offspring. Where two lycanthropes produce lycanthropic children, shifters result when one parent is human.

Mingling between the two peoples produced shifters enough that they have become a true race, much as half-elves and half-orcs might gather in small communities. They form into tribes such as the razorclaws and longtooths. Shifter tribes typically include lycanthropes and humans, and tend to favor places steeped in primal magic. For more information on shifters, see *Player's Handbook*® 2.

For three days, the moon vanished, and the Maiden who set it there grew angry. Sehanine descended to the earth to find her missing treasure, searching mountain and forest, hill and field, and yet found nothing. As the sun set on the fourth day, she turned to the children of the forests and asked who had taken the moon. None would speak except for one man—a simple farmer—and he revealed the theft.

Sehanine swept into the werebeasts' camp like a storm. She slew Fenris, and his blood stained the silver crimson. Before she withdrew to replace the sphere in its proper place, she laid a curse against them. "That which you sought, you will never have. That which you will never have will ever be your master. When the moonlight shines, may your true natures be revealed." Sehanine's curse had several consequences. First, werebeasts have been tied to the lunar cycles and feel their bestial natures become stronger and harder to control when the moon is full in the sky. Second, lycanthropes cannot abide silver's touch since the pure metal has powerful symbolic and supernatural connections to the moon. Third, and finally, the werebeasts loathe humanity because a human man revealed their theft. This loathing has evolved into a terrible hunger for human flesh and blood.

Touched by the Spirit World

Although many lycanthropes hold Melora as their creator, a few shamans point to another figure: the Primal Beast. Of all the primal spirits, the Primal Beast is the most savage. It embodies the predator, representing nature in all its most dangerous forms. According to the shamans, the first lycanthropes were savage humans who honored the violent spirit in different aspects—wolf, fox, raven, bear, and others. Their devotion to the Primal Beast gave their mystics strange powers: the ability to change shape and adopt the totems they venerated. The more they surrendered themselves to the Primal Beast, the greater the spirit's hold over them became until the invaders showed up.

Stories disagree about who these invaders were. They might have been settlers from an ancient empire, rampaging orcs, an undead army led by Vecna, or something else. What is known is that the initial forays by these invaders were disastrous to the savage people. As the dead mounted, the shamans beseeched the Primal Beast for aid. The people's plight moved the spirit: the Primal Beast stirred from the spirit world and touched all who served him, awakening in them a beast. Although they remained more or less human, they could shed their human forms to become beasts to escape their foes or rend them with tooth and claw. With the Primal Beast's aid, the clans threw back the invaders and secured their lands.

What they came to realize was that the Primal Beast's gift changed them forever, and they had become children of the spirit world—a people forever after bound to the beast. Differences between the clans drove them apart, and they spread across the world, each contending with their new natures in their own ways. The wolf clan became ferocious and warlike, while the rat clan infested civilization. Of them all, only the werebears reconciled their divided natures and used their power to preserve the wilderness and safeguard from the enemies without, yet they were too few and too scattered to unify the clans once more. And thus the skinchangers were born and they have troubled the world ever since.

Nerull's Plagues

The tragedy in the divine and primal origin stories suggests some explanation for why lycanthropes are as violent as they are and, to some extent, creates sympathy for these peoples. These tales might be nothing more than fabrications—wild, fanciful myths designed to place these people in the world and explain their actions. The stories do little to expose why lycanthropes are almost universally a wicked and monstrous people, who are carriers of plague and despoilers of the good.

Enemies of the lycanthropes deny the old tales and point to the sickness each werebeast carries as evidence of corruption in lycanthropes. Werebeasts carry filth fever, moon frenzy, and worse. Each time they attack, they spread their plagues so that even the ones lucky to survive these terrifying encounters likely die anyway. A few stories talk about how those sickened by a lycanthrope's bite become werebeasts themselves.

Some theologians blame Nerull for the lycanthropic plague. The old tales recall a time when the Lord of the Dead loosed plagues against the world to claim mortal lives and imprison them in his shadowy realm. Sickness reigned supreme, and entire civilizations died. These scholars believe the first lycanthropes appeared during this age and were people Nerull chose to spread the sickness. These men and women were transformed into merciless killers, slaughtering and infecting wherever they went. Although the Raven Queen ended Nerull's threat, the lycanthropes remain a legacy of the old dark god.

Since most lycanthropes infect their victims with sickness, the explanation above makes a great deal of sense. Opponents to this theory counter it by saying the disease is a byproduct of the environments these shapechangers inhabit and the fodder they eat. For example, wererats might carry filth fever, but so too do dire rats and otyughs. The same could be true for moon frenzy or any of the other diseases transmitted by a lycanthrope's bite. It might be that disease could have been one story for skinchangers in the world, but it is certainly not the only one.

Lycanthropes in the World

Lycanthropes encompass a wide range of creatures. For each animal in the world, a good chance exists that a lycanthrope can adopt its form. How lycanthropes fit into the world and beyond depends on their animalistic natures.

Nearly all lycanthropes crave human flesh and are thus drawn to places where humans congregate. Wererats, for example, infiltrate human cities and claim the sewers and abandoned buildings. They use such places to mount raids into the city, stealing riches and lives in equal numbers until the militia or an adventuring band roots them out. Others lurk on civilization's fringes, where they can trouble the lonely roads and the isolated farmsteads with impunity. Only when food becomes scarce do these werebeasts dare attack larger and better protected targets. Such attacks last only until they have eaten their fill or are driven back to the wilderness once more.

Many werebeasts gather in clans led by the strongest in the group. Werewolves in particular collect in large packs led by a lord who holds the position until a younger, stronger lycanthrope can take it. These clans do not mingle with other lycanthropes. They might share a common heritage, yet they regard other breeds as competition for resources already scarce.

Not all lycanthropes seek out their kind. A few, such as the werebear, prefer isolation. Werebears, for example, lack the evil bent so common to lycanthropes and see themselves as nature's protectors.

Brokenstone Vale

The appetite for human flesh earns lycanthropes intolerance, fear, and hatred. Most settlements in the natural world guard against these creatures by hanging wolfsbane over their doors or placing silver coins in their windows to keep the monsters at bay. If whispers reach a town about a skinchanger at large, the people organize into mobs to bring down the beast before it can spread its sickness or claim any more lives. Thus, for most shapechangers, there is hostility on all sides, and even those who master the beast within them and seek to live normal lives must deal with the threat of discovery at all times.

Yet all is not without hope for the lycanthropes. A place known to the werebeasts allows them to live without fear of persecution and in the company of their own kind. Brokenstone Vale has, for many, become something of a promised land for the destitute and disaffected. Some werebeasts spend their lives searching for the safety the vale promises.

In truth, little peace exists in the savage realm of Brokenstone Vale. The lycanthropes living there war against each other most of the time, and order and unity are almost alien concepts. Furthermore, this fabled land lies far beyond the natural world, which is hidden deep in the Feywild behind hostile eladrin who remember well the War of the Pelt that pitted fey against shapechanger for an entire generation.

Brokenstone Vale became a refuge for lycanthropes ages ago, when the werebeasts first explored the Feywild while searching for a new home free from the persecution in the natural world. Rather than temper their violent impulses, the lycanthropes felt that the Feywild's abundance gave them an excuse to hunt and raid with little restraint. The eladrin, who bore the brunt of these attacks, responded in force, and thus began the War of the Pelt. For years, the two sides fought. Eladrin magic destroyed many among the werebeasts and drove them back, deeper and deeper into the mountains. Each victory came at a terrible price, and the eladrin could not replenish their warriors and wizards fast enough to compensate for their own casualties. The war ground down to a stalemate.

Rather than perpetuate the violence, the eladrin agreed to let the werebeasts live in peace provided they never left the mountain vale they held. With no other recourse other than extinction, the lycanthropes agreed and made do in their new home. The vale, however, could not sustain their numbers. The werebeasts were not farmers; they were hunters. In a few short years, they wiped out the wildlife and turned against each other. A few tried to flee, but the eladrin were ready to destroy any skinchanger that crossed the boundary.

The werebeasts might have died out, yet a leader emerged—one strong enough to unite the tribes and bring order of a sort to the vale. The werewolf lord, Viktor Mazan, modeled himself on the ancient king who first gathered the skinchanger tribes long ago, and he founded a settlement on the vale's lower slopes where all lycanthropes could live together. Mazan taught them to farm the land, to mine the mountains, and to use the land's resources wisely. They even began to trade with the eladrin. Old grudges and violent tendencies trouble the community still, yet Mazan rules with a firm hand and has thus far enjoyed great success in keeping his people alive. Not everyone wants Mazan's new civilization, and rumors have begun to circulate that factions in the upper mountains plot to destroy the werewolf lord and resume the war against the fey once more.

Lycanthrope Themes

According to the *Monster Manual* and *Monster Vault* books, lycanthropes are a race unto themselves. That they can assume human forms does not, in fact, suggest they are human. Instead, the human form is merely one form they can wear. The world of Dungeons & Dragons, however, is big enough to accommodate other kinds of lycanthropes: people who are cursed, afflicted by a disease, or born with the ability to change shape. To represent these characters, this article presents three new themes available to just about any sort of character you would want to play.

Before you choose one of these themes, talk with your Dungeon Master about the role lycanthropes play in your setting. If a person can become a lycanthrope from a werewolf's bite, for example, you can pair up the theme with just about any race. If the DM prefers to keep lycanthropes as they are presented in the monster books, then human, or maybe some variation of human such as half-elf or half-orc, might be your only options.

CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. For example, the werebear theme works well for a druid character who wants to actively fight against those who would despoil nature.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," *Dragon* 399.

VARIANT LYCANTHROPY

In older editions of Dungeons & Dragons, lycanthropy was a supernatural disease and a curse. A character could become afflicted with lycanthropy after being bitten by a werebeast and thereafter transform into a wererat, werewolf, or something else, depending on the enemy that transmitted the disease or curse. Although the *Monster Manual* and *Monster Vault* books posit lycanthropes as being a true race, not all lycanthropes have to be. Characters could become lycanthropes after contracting a disease.

When a character reaches stage 3 of any disease gained from a lycanthrope's attack, the character becomes cursed. During the next full moon, the character gains the appropriate lycanthrope theme. Thus, a character bitten by a wererat and who reaches filth fever's third stage would become a wererat during the next full moon.

If the character already has a theme, the character loses the original theme and any features or powers gained from it. The character then gains the new theme and gains all the features granted by level. The player can then choose to replace lost utility powers with those from his or her class, skills, or the new theme.

Werebear

"I do not consider my nature to be a curse. It is a duty. I safeguard the wilds from those who would despoil them."

The wilderness holds dangers aplenty for the unwary and unprepared. Savage humanoids gather in fell places to launch raids against caravans and homestead alike. Twisted monsters lurk in the shadows and deep caves. Old ruins harbor the spirits of old kings and warriors turned to evil. As dangerous as these realms can be, certain folk take it upon themselves to protect the world and innocents from these threats. From the fearless ranger who prowls the old paths to the druid who secures founts of primal magic from exploitation and ruin, such guardians fight on the front lines against the spreading darkness. Yet they do not fight alone. The legendary werebears emerge from their isolation to fight at their sides and uphold the ancient charge placed upon them by nature's divine protector.

Werebears stand apart from most skinchangers. They lack the evil natures that compel their cousins to commit violence against mankind. Rather than grapple with the bloodlust and savagery so pervasive among the werebeasts, they retain their morality, in part from Melora's favor and also from the great task they accept as theirs. As Sehanine's curse spread through the werebeast clans, Melora reached out from her heavenly realm and sheltered the bear clan. They had ever been among her most devout servants and took no part in the misguided effort to steal the moon from the sky. In exchange, she commanded them and all their descendants to protect the world against their fellows' wickedness, to secure the wilderness against the despoiler and destroyer, and, above all, to keep alive the old ways of the world's magic.

Although many werebears descend from the bear clan, others come by their lycanthropic natures in different ways. Rangers, wardens, and others might receive the gift of lycanthropy after performing a great service for the druids or for a nature spirit. Melora sometimes rewards favored priests with the ability to transform into bears after a demonstration of uncommon devotion.

Regardless of the transformation's cause, werebears do not remain in civilized areas. They live alone in unspoiled forests and mountains. They construct crude shelters or settle in caves. And the lands and all the creatures living there for miles around fall under their protection. Werebears tend their lands and watch over their charges to ensure the natural processes are left undisturbed. Should anything or anyone threaten the lands they guard, the werebears respond with deadly force and lead the people and the beasts to destroy their intruder, fighting until no threat remains.

Even though many werebears remain in their chosen lands, some do not settle in one place for long. They come to see the entire world as their responsibility. These werebears are the ones most likely to become adventurers, and they crusade against evil in all its forms. They take up with like-minded adventurers, preferring the company of individuals also connected to the spirit world.

Creating a Werebear

Werebears dwell in the wilderness where they can fulfill the sacred duty that Melora or the primal spirits gave them. They are protectors and champions who roam the world, working to preserve nature as it was intended and to safeguard it from those villains who would exploit or despoil it. To better meet their obligations, werebears choose classes that help them not only navigate the wilderness but also draw from its magic. For these reasons many werebears become wardens, finding in that class the powers and capabilities needed to make good on their ancient promise. Less-rooted werebears might instead become rangers, since the class favors those who take the fight to evil rather than guard against it.

Although werebears consider the world's safety a chief concern, it is not the only one. Many realize much damage has already been done to the world, either from dark magic, alien invasion, or even civilization's steady expansion. Rather than just holding what they can, these werebears seek to repair the damage done and secure it for the future. Those with primal inclinations favor the druid and shaman classes, while werebears with strong divine connections lean toward the cleric class and usually worship Melora.

Viktor Mazan, Werewolf Lord of Brokenstone Vale

Bear Shape Werebear Utility

Surrendering to the beast within causes you to shed your humanoid form and become a savage bear.

Encounter ✦ Polymorph
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You change from your humanoid form to a beast form—a bear—that lasts until the end of the encounter. Alternatively, you can end the form as a minor action and shift 1 square. While you are in beast form, you can't use weapon or implement attack powers that lack the beast form keyword, although you can sustain such powers.

While in this form, you have low-light vision. The form is your size, and it doesn't otherwise change your game statistics or movement modes. Your equipment becomes part of the form, but you drop anything you are holding, except implements you can use. You continue to gain the benefits of the equipment you wear, except a shield.

You can use the properties and the powers of implements as well as magic items you wear, but not the properties or the powers of weapons or the powers of wondrous items. While equipment is part of the form, it cannot be removed, and anything in a container that is part of your form is inaccessible.

Until the form ends, you can use the secondary power at will.

Secondary Power (Beast Form)
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Attack: Highest ability modifier + 3 vs. AC
Level 11: Highest ability modifier + 6
Level 21: Highest ability modifier + 9
Hit: 1d8 + highest ability modifier damage, and you mark the target until the start of your next turn.
Level 21: 2d8 + highest ability modifier damage.
Special: You can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Starting Feature

As a lycanthrope, a werebear can transform from humanoid form to that of a bear and back again. When you assume a bear's form, you become a powerful beast armed with long claws and sharp teeth to better rend your foes. Even when not in bear form, you retain the animal's hardiness, making you better able to resist the challenges faced by living in the wilderness, though silver still causes you to back off.

Benefits: You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws against disease.

You have the shapechanger subtype. As such, you are subject to effects that affect shapechangers. In addition, any enemy has combat advantage against you when attacking you with a silvered weapon or implement.

In addition, you gain the *bear shape* power.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

You have an affinity for dealing with bears due to insights you've gained when you've adopted a bear's form, plus you become hardier while in your bear form.

Benefit: When interacting with bears or similar creatures, you gain a +2 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate checks.

Additionally, while *bear shape* is active, you gain a +1 power bonus to AC and Fortitude.

Level 10 Feature

Experience teaches you to control your lycanthropic nature so that when you embrace the beast within you, you need not fully transform into a bear. Instead, you can retain your humanoid shape while adopting the bear's appearance and power.

Benefit: When you use the *bear shape* power, you can assume the form of a humanoid-bear hybrid, instead of a bear. While in hybrid form, your equipment does not become part of your new form, and you are not forced to drop any items you are holding. You are also not limited to using implement and weapon attack powers that have the beast form keyword.

Optional Powers

A close connection to the spirit world protects many werebears from the terrible curse afflicting their skinchanger kin. Freedom from bloodlust grants werebears the ability to explore their dual nature and reconcile the conflict between them until they can learn to achieve true harmony.

Level 2 Utility Power

As you become more comfortable in your bear form, you learn to use its great strength to grab hold of your opponent and grasp it tightly. Additionally, the wounds you suffer in combat heal in moments.

Bear Up Werebear Utility 2

Your massive arms itch to wrap your enemy in a crushing embrace from which there is little hope of escape, and your wounds begin to close.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form, Healing
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must have started this turn bloodied.

Effect: Until the end of the encounter, when you hit with *bear shape*'s secondary power, you can grab the target until the end of your next turn. In addition, while you are bloodied and in beast form, you have regeneration 2.
Level 11: Regeneration 4.
Level 21: Regeneration 6.

Level 6 Utility Power

The bear spirit sharing your body is a constant presence in your heart and mind. Should the danger grow too great, the bear might break free from your self-imposed restraints and emerge with a mighty, terrifying roar.

Enraged Bear Werebear Utility 6

Sudden pain shatters your control and you transform into a bear before your enemies' eyes.

Daily ✦ Beast Form, Fear
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: An attack hits you while you are not in your beast form.
Effect: You use *bear shape* even if the power is already expended. Each enemy within 3 squares of you that can see you takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Level 10 Utility Power

The primal spirits reward those werebears who protect and nurture the natural world by granting them an evocation that can remove afflictions and ease suffering. When you use this power, a soft light limns your body and flows toward the ally you would help.

Blessing of the Great Bear Werebear Utility 10

You call out to the Great Bear and feel nature's magic flow through to aid an ally in need.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form, Primal
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: You or one ally
Effect: You end one effect that a saving throw can end on the target.

Wererat

"People scorn rats, yet are they not among the world's best survivors?"

They carry plague. They live in squalor and filth. They eat whatever they can, fouling foodstuffs and other supplies with their leavings. And they breed at an alarming rate. For these reasons, most folk consider rats vermin and it's no surprise that rat catchers patrol almost every city, venturing into the sewers and exploring the docks with dog and club to control the rat population. Whispers circulate among those who do this thankless job about the big rats that can break a ratter's neck with a single bite. And then some tell stories that no one dares believe: tales of rats who walk upright as humans.

Wererats find no more welcome among other skinchangers than they do in civilization. Deemed the lowest form of werebeast, they have few opportunities to interact with other clans. Instead, they keep to their own kind and live with the rats whose warrens they share. More than any other lycanthrope, wererats live among human populations, hiding in plain sight and learning the secret ways in and out of the city to move about unseen when hunting. They claim the sewers, the abandoned buildings, and the slums, where witnesses are rare and reports about their activities go unheard. They are scavengers, picking through civilization's leavings and spreading their disease wherever they can.

Despite the hostility toward wererats coming from all fronts, they not only survive, but also thrive. Wererats might be hated, yet they exist in the largest numbers. They might be rejected, yet they operate in extensive communities so that they do not need assistance or aid from other werebeasts. And although they might lack the ferocity or durability enjoyed by rivals, their swarms can overwhelm even the toughest werewolf.

Since wererats live among humans, they have the best opportunities to pursue adventuring classes. Rarely, a wererat might change his or her views regarding humans and make efforts at restitution for past crimes, if not directly to improve the community, then indirectly to fight for other communities. A few wererats owe their natures to a chance encounter with another wererat or plague-bearing dire rat. Once the disease runs its course, the individual is uprooted and searching for a new future as a shapechanger.

Creating a Wererat

Wererats require large host populations to sustain their warrens. For this reason, wererats populate cities, living within or below them where they can steal what they need to survive and carry out various mischievous plans. Most wererat adventurers take much from the experience inherent in living secretly amid others and apply what they've learned toward their adventuring careers. As one might expect, wererat thieves and scoundrels are quite common, and a few might go further and become assassins. Some wererats could instead focus on survival skills and become rangers or possibly tempest fighters to better defend themselves against attack. Also, since most wererats survive by stealing, they sometimes come upon magical lore, and the most cunning among them can learn to decipher the strange writing to become powerful wizards, warlocks, and sorcerers.

Starting Feature

You can change your shape to become a dire rat, a monstrous and larger version of an ordinary rat. While in this form, the disease you carry—filth fever—becomes infectious, and anyone you bite is at risk of contracting it. Your time as a wererat teaches you how to move unseen and to avoid attracting attention.

Additionally, silver is particularly harmful to you, and enemies that attack you with silvered weapons have a deadly advantage against you.

Benefits: You gain a +2 power bonus to Stealth checks.

You have the shapechanger subtype. As such, you are subject to effects that affect shapechangers. In addition, any enemy has combat advantage against you when attacking you with a silvered weapon or implement. Also, you are immune to filth fever.

Finally, you gain the *dire rat shape* power.

Werewolf Devotee of the Primal Beast

Dire Rat Shape Wererat Utility

By embracing your bestial nature, you undergo a disturbing transformation into a vicious dire rat.

Encounter ✦ Polymorph
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You change from your humanoid form to a beast form—a dire rat—that lasts until the end of the encounter. Alternatively, you can end the form as a minor action and shift 1 square. While you are in beast form, you can't use weapon or implement attack powers that lack the beast form keyword, although you can sustain such powers.

While in this form, you have low-light vision. The form is Small, and it doesn't otherwise change your game statistics or movement modes. Your equipment becomes part of the form, but you drop anything you are holding, except implements you can use. You continue to gain the benefits of the equipment you wear, except a shield.

You can use the properties and the powers of implements as well as magic items you wear, but not the properties or the powers of weapons or the powers of wondrous items. While equipment is part of the form, it cannot be removed, and anything in a container that is part of your form is inaccessible.

Until the form ends, you can use the secondary power at will.

Secondary Power (Beast Form)
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Attack: Highest ability modifier + 3 vs. AC
Level 11: Highest ability modifier + 6
Level 21: Highest ability modifier + 9
Hit: 1d4 + highest ability modifier damage. If the target is granting you combat advantage, it also takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Level 21: 2d4 + highest ability modifier damage.
Special: You can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Your experiences as a dire rat have revealed much to you about rats, their minds, and their behaviors. You can draw on your expertise to help handle and deal with these creatures. You also respond more quickly to threats while in your dire rat form.

Benefit: When interacting with rats or similar creatures, you gain a +2 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate checks.

In addition, while *dire rat shape* is active, you gain a +2 power bonus to Reflex.

Level 10 Feature

You realize your full potential as a wererat when you master your transformation. Rather than adopt a humanoid or beast form, you can fuse the forms together to become a hybrid. In this form, you benefit from the dire rat's speed and quickness, while retaining the ability to cast spells and use the items you carry. There are still times when transforming into a dire rat can be advantageous, and you have become so comfortable in that form that you can use its natural agility to evade enemy attacks.

Benefit: When you use the *dire rat shape* power, you can assume the form of a humanoid-rat hybrid, instead of a dire rat. While in hybrid form, your equipment does not become part of your new form, and you are not forced to drop any items you are holding. You are also not limited to using implement and weapon attack powers that have the beast form keyword.

Optional Powers

Wererats survive due to superior cunning and a willingness to hide in places others fear to explore. As you come to terms with your lycanthropic nature, you have opportunities to deepen your understanding

about your beast form and learn new ways to use your dire rat form to your advantage.

Level 2 Utility Power

As with other lycanthropes, you can recover from your injuries in combat more quickly, as if the quality that allows you to change form also repairs injuries you sustain in battle. Also, while in your rat form, your claws help you scurry up walls and reach escape routes beyond your enemies' reach.

Rat-Blooded Wererat Utility 2

Your claws help you scramble up a vertical surface with ease, and your madly beating heart increases your vitality.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form, Healing
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must have started this turn bloodied.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you gain a climb speed equal to half your speed while you are in beast form. In addition, while you are bloodied and in beast form, you have regeneration 2.
Level 11: Regeneration 4.
Level 21: Regeneration 6.

Level 6 Utility Power

Speed and quickness make dire rats challenging foes to face. While in your beast form, you can race past your enemies, slipping through their ranks so that you can attack where they are most vulnerable.

Rat Scurry Wererat Utility 6

You scurry between your enemies' feet, slipping past their reach to get into position.

At-Will ✦ Beast Form
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: You shift up to 2 squares.

Level 10 Utility Power

Although many tales and rumors talk about wererats, no one expects to face them. You play up your transformation to give your foes a momentary fright.

Wererat Feint Wererat Utility 10

You catch your enemies by surprise when you shed your humanoid form to become a dire rat.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form
Free Action **Close** burst 2
Trigger: You use the *dire rat shape* power.
Target: Each enemy that can see you in the burst
Effect: The target grants combat advantage to you until the end of your next turn.

Werewolf

"The beast within me strains to escape my control, and when it does, you must run. Run as fast as you can, but I'll warn you that even that might not be enough."

When people think of lycanthropy, they think of werewolves. No other lycanthrope evokes the same fear, even if other lycanthropes might be stronger and more dangerous. Life on the frontiers puts settlers in contact with wolves and, having watched livestock vanish and having fended off attacks against ravenous wolves, the fears seem justified, even though most wolves avoid mankind when they can.

Although ordinary wolves are content to go their own way, ranging across the countryside in packs, werewolves hunt humans. They and the wolves they enslave are aggressive, vicious, and unrelenting in their attacks. Werewolf packs are dangerous, since they can scout out the landscape by day in human form and launch attacks by night. They might be fearless in battle, but they avoid the cities where they face discovery and death. Instead, they keep to the wilderness, where their attacks might go unnoticed and where retribution comes slowly—if at all.

As with all lycanthropes, being a werewolf is no guarantee of evil. The hunger remains, but a strong will can control it. It is always a struggle, though. A werewolf must always fight to keep the beast in check, and sometimes even the best efforts are not enough. Werewolves seeking redemption for or escape from their natures favor the adventurer's life since it carries them away from innocents and lets them vent their fury on more deserving foes.

Nearly all werewolves inherited their natures from their parents, passing on what many would consider to be a curse. Such werewolves are human or have human blood, such as half-elves or half-orcs. Just about any other natural or fey race could become a werewolf by succumbing to moon frenzy or fall prey to a curse due to their bloodlust.

Creating a Werewolf

Werewolves have intense cravings for human blood, and this hunger urges them toward rash and violent action. For this reason werewolves pursue classes that put them on the battle's front lines where they can rip and tear through their opponents. Most werewolves become barbarians and slayers. Werewolves attuned to nature also find success as scouts and beastmaster rangers. Unlike other lycanthropes, werewolves have little interest in primal spirits and thus do not often become druids, sentinels, or shamans.

Starting Feature

Within your body hides the wolf's spirit, and if you choose to release it, you undergo a startling transformation. Fur sprouts all over your body, your teeth lengthen, and joints pop to accommodate your bestial form. The wolf's spirit lends you power, and its form lets you deliver a terrible wound.

You have an instinctive fear of silver, and when it's used against you, you cannot help but recoil.

Benefits: You gain a +2 power bonus to Intimidate checks.

You have the shapechanger subtype. As such, you are subject to effects that affect shapechangers. In addition, any enemy has combat advantage against

you when attacking you with a silvered weapon or implement. Also, you are immune to moon frenzy.

Finally, you gain the *wolf shape* power.

Wolf Shape Werewolf Utility

Loosing the beast within triggers a sudden, painful transformation into a menacing wolf.

Encounter ✦ Polymorph
Minor Action **Personal**

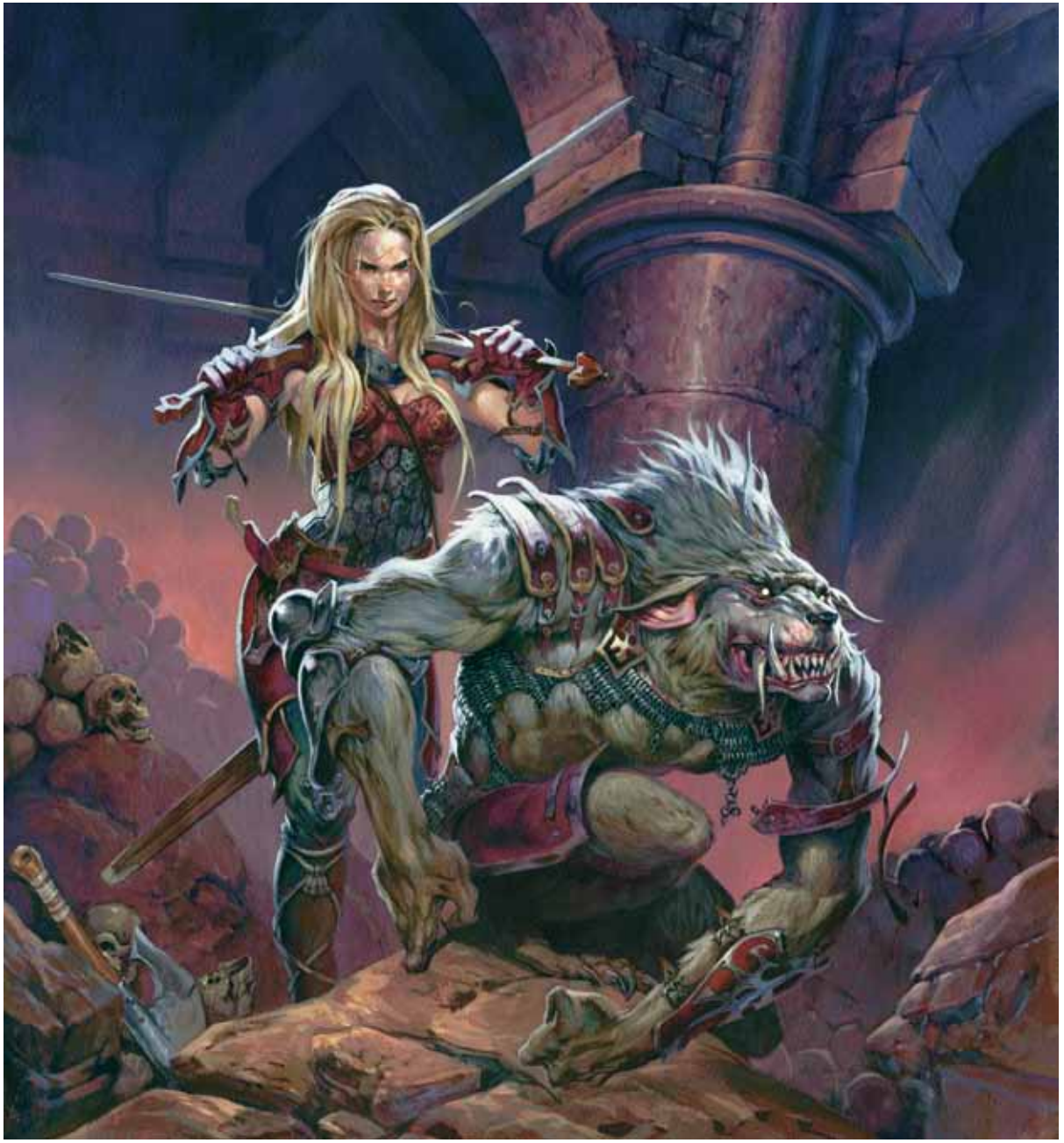
Effect: You change from your humanoid form to a beast form—a wolf—that lasts until the end of the encounter. Alternatively, you can end the form as a minor action and shift 1 square. While you are in beast form, you can't use weapon or implement attack powers that lack the beast form keyword, although you can sustain such powers.

While in this form, you have low-light vision. The form is your size, and it doesn't otherwise change your game statistics or movement modes. Your equipment becomes part of the form, but you drop anything you are holding, except implements you can use. You continue to gain the benefits of the equipment you wear, except a shield.

You can use the properties and the powers of implements as well as magic items you wear, but not the properties or the powers of weapons or the powers of wondrous items. While equipment is part of the form, it cannot be removed, and anything in a container that is part of your form is inaccessible.

Until the form ends, you can use the secondary power at will.

Secondary Power (Beast Form)
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Attack: Highest ability modifier + 3 vs. AC
Level 11: Highest ability modifier + 6
Level 21: Highest ability modifier + 9
Hit: 1d10 + highest ability modifier damage.
Level 21: 2d10 + highest ability modifier damage.
Special: You can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.



Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Your bestial nature gives you a powerful connection to other wolves. You can sense their feelings, almost as if you could read their thoughts. You also have an unnatural fleetness that comes from your dual nature.

Benefit: When interacting with wolves and similar creatures, you gain a +2 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate checks.

In addition, while *wolf shape* is active, you gain a +2 power bonus to speed.

Level 10 Feature

The more accustomed you become to your divided nature, the easier it is to live with your duality. Rather than be one or the other, you have learned to embrace both at once and can now assume a hybrid form that gives you access to the best of both forms.

Benefit: When you use the *wolf shape* power, you can assume the form of a humanoid-wolf hybrid, instead of a wolf. While in hybrid form, your equipment does not become part of your new form, and you are not forced to drop any items you are holding. You are also not limited to using implement and weapon attack powers that have the beast form keyword.

Optional Powers

The only way to end the conflict roiling in your soul is to embrace the beast within. In time you learn to control the violent impulses and can channel them in constructive ways. The wolf is hard to tame, however, and sometimes it takes control.

Level 2 Utility Power

The first asset you gain from your beast form is increased speed. Giving into the wolf's nature helps you spring across the battlefield to lead the charge against your enemies, plus you might gain a boost to your ability to heal yourself.

Wolf's Vitality — Werewolf Utility 2

Anger courses through your veins and lends a fierce strength to your legs.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form, Healing
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must have started this turn bloodied.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, your speed increases by 1 while you are in beast form. In addition, while you are bloodied and in beast form, you have regeneration 2.
Level 11: Regeneration 4.
Level 21: Regeneration 6.

Level 6 Utility Power

You can use your bulk and speed to send an enemy sprawling while it's distracted by one of your allies.

Pack Attack — Werewolf Utility 6

Wolves fight better in packs, which you prove when you work with your allies.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form
Free Action **Special**
Trigger: You hit an enemy with *wolf shape*'s secondary power, and the enemy is adjacent to at least one of your allies.
Effect: You also knock the enemy prone.

Level 10 Utility Power

Every time you experience pain, you risk losing control. When you lose control, the wolf takes over. This power gives you great strength but risks making enemies of your allies.

Werewolf Frenzy — Werewolf Utility 10

Your pain drives you to madness, causing you to lash out at anything in your reach.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form, Stance
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: While your *wolf shape* is active, an attack bloodies you, or you are hit while bloodied.
Effect: You assume the werewolf frenzy stance until you are no longer bloodied. While in this stance, you gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls, and your beast form attack powers deal 1d6 extra damage. Until your *wolf shape* ends, your allies provoke opportunity attacks from you, and you must make every opportunity attack that you can.

About the Author

In the ten years or so **Robert J. Schwalb** has spent working on games, he's designed and developed scads of books and articles for Dungeons & Dragons, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the d20 System. Some of his more recent work can be found in *Player's Option: Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*, *The Book of Vile Darkness*, the *Spiral of Tharizdun* set of *D&D Fortune Cards*, and his first novel *Death Mark*. Rob is currently working as a designer on the next iteration of D&D.

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FOLD

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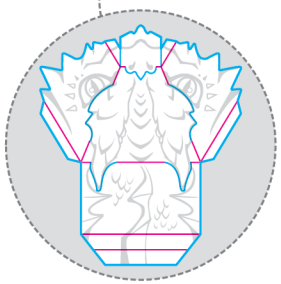
RESULT:

WHEN COMPLETE:
TERRORIZE INNOCENT VILLAGERS AND GATHER YOUR TREASURE HOARD.



CUT ALONG THE BLUE LINES

FOLD ALONG THE MAGENTA LINES

MATCH THE STARS!
INSERT THE HEAD 'TAB' (★) INTO BODY AND ADHERE TO TOP OF BACK (☆)

! DON'T FORGET !
CUT A SLIT IN THE DRAGON'S BACK TO INSERT ITS WINGS!

FOLD DOWN, INSERT INTO SLIT IN BACK AND GLUE TO *INSIDE* OF BODY

REQUIRED TOOLS
- X-ACTO KNIFE/SCISSORS
- GLUE STICK/TAPE

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Bazaar of the Bizarre:

Thingamajigs of the Barrier Peaks

By Dave Chalker

Illustration by Mark Winters and Drew Baker

Surely you have heard the tales of the strange creatures that plagued the Grand Duchy. No? Well, allow me, your humble shopkeeper, to enlighten you today. These stories tell of how predatory creatures emerged from a gated cave at random intervals. The area defied all attempts at exploration until recently, when one expedition to the Barrier Peaks explored the caves to attempt to stem the tide of strange invaders. During their efforts, they found some unusual items and brought them back. Lucky for you, I have these very items on sale here. Let me tell you about them.

The Legend of the Barrier Peaks

The group of adventurers was successful, after a fashion, though at great cost. Only one survivor named Kzunt made it out of the Barrier Peaks alive to tell the tale of what happened. His stories included details of strange devices that operated under a kind of magic that the wizards of his group could not decipher. Other descriptive tidbits of the location include colored doors accessed only by flat keys of matching colors, metal rooms, guardian golems possessed of unique intelligence, sinister plant creatures unlike any ever encountered before, a creeping brown toxic mold, and enormous frogs. Even stranger, the structure seemed to have arrived there from far away and crashed into the mountains, and Kzunt theorized that it had originally been inhabited by another race that was now absent.

Even for the stories of adventurers, Kzunt's tales of the Barrier Peaks seemed too unusual to be true. Descriptions of metal vessels, tentacled ambush bunnies, and strange devices have no place in the lands of the Duchy. The stories were judged to be the product of whatever horrors Kzunt witnessed within the Barrier Peaks, or possibly the result of the strange disease that he had contracted within the caves, which had caused his skin to become scaly, like that of a dragonborn. Though he was thanked for his service to the Grand Duchy and rewarded appropriately, Kzunt was dismissed from the service of the land.

That is when I encountered Kzunt. It seemed that the adventurer had left out an important detail: He had recovered a number of the devices from within the Barrier Peaks. These unreliable yet powerful devices were all that Kzunt had left.

I listened to all of Kzunt's tales, especially those that involved these devices, with great interest. We worked out an arrangement where I would pay him for these devices and also would fund whatever healing magic he needed to recover from the strange disease that afflicted him. The clerics, unfortunately for him, could not help Kzunt recover. The disease progressed such that he grew extra arms, turned purple, and lost the ability to speak.

I hired the best wizards and servants to help finish cataloguing these devices, or "thingamajigs," as Kzunt liked to refer to them. These items of strange magic work like nothing we have encountered before. My research staff has done its best to discern their functions and operations, and I am happy to train you in their use if you seek to use them in your grand quests. You must first promise always to remember the stories of those who journeyed to the Barrier Peaks to recover these devices, and to always operate the devices in the manner in which they were intended.

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FOR THE DM: WHEN THINGAMAJIGS GO BAD

To set these items that have science fiction themes apart from more traditional magic items, consider using these rules to simulate the unreliability of long-abandoned technological marvels. Be mindful of the consequences of using these rules; a player whose character is built around the use of *powered armor* won't be happy if the armor ceases to function.

Each item in this article has a stability rating.

Item	Stability	Item	Stability
blaster rifle	-3	laser sword	+0
blue communicator	+3	*needler pistol*	+0
chainsaw sword	+0	*powered armor*	-4
confusion ray	-4	*singularity grenade*	-4
gray security card	+3	*sleep grenade*	-4
jet pack	-2	*wheely sled*	+1

The first time each turn that a character uses an item's power, roll a d20 and add the item's stability rating, then find the result on the list below. When the text mentions a malfunction, refer to the "Malfunction" entry in the item's stat block. The item malfunctions as specified in its statistics block even though the stated triggering condition was not met.

Stability Check Results

1 or Lower: The item malfunctions and then detonates, dealing fire damage to you and each creature adjacent to you. The damage equals 1d8 for every five levels of the item (level 1-5, 1d8; 6-10, 2d8; 11-15, 3d8; and so on). The item is destroyed.

2-3: The item malfunctions and then detonates, dealing 1d6 thunder damage to you for every five levels of the item. The item is destroyed.

4-5: The item malfunctions and then is rendered permanently useless.

6-7: The item malfunctions.

8-9: The item does nothing.

10: The item operates normally and then malfunctions.

11-15: The item operates normally.

16-17: The item operates normally. The next time you activate the item, you do not need to make a stability check to operate it.

18 or Higher: The item operates normally. If you are using the item to make an attack that hits, the attack is automatically a critical hit.

Keeping Items Operational: Although the devices presented here are likely significantly different from those that adventurers are used to dealing with, a DM might rule that a character with arcane skills can help to keep devices working. Once per day, a character who has training in Arcana can make an Arcana check at a hard DC of the item's level to try to keep an item operational. If the check is successful, the item's stability rating increases by 2 for 24 hours.

Item Descriptions

Twelve of the technological marvels that Kzunt salvaged from the Barrier Peaks are spotlighted below, along with information a concerned buyer will want to know.

Powered Armor

Do not be alarmed: This is not a creature of metal that we have captured. In fact, it has more in common with the armor your paladin friend over there is wearing. It provides ample protection in battle, and it grants its wearer the ability to see invisible foes and even to fly as if completely weightless. If you decide to purchase the item, make sure that I properly instruct you on how to release the helmet. That was quite embarrassing the first time, let me tell you!

Powered Armor Level 10+ Rare

The armor appears to have been worked to create the illusion of a heavily muscled humanoid.

Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp			

Armor: Plate

Enhancement Bonus: AC

Properties

- ✦ You can seal or unseal the armor as a minor action. While sealed, the armor provides 8 hours of breathable air. Once the air is used up, it replenishes after 6 hours.
- ✦ You gain blindsight and tremorsense, with a range equal to the armor's enhancement bonus.
- ✦ Your Strength score is considered 5 points higher for the purposes of determining encumbrance.
- ✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll, you are restrained and begin suffocating. You or an adjacent ally can use a standard action to make an Athletics check (hard DC of the item's level) to end this effect. You cannot seal or unseal the armor until this effect ends

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: You gain a fly speed equal to your speed until the end of your next turn.

Blaster Rifle

Kzunt's original group thought this was an advanced mirror that was able to fold out and enable you to see behind you. The group used it to look around corners before advancing into a new room, until the party's rogue insisted that the ranger extend the mirror all the way so he could get a close shave in the morning. Unfortunately for him, the rogue received a closer shave than he had asked for when a solid blast of flame projected from the "mirror." Further experimentation led to finding multiple settings for firing the mirror. Just to be sure, none of the companions shaved for the rest of the expedition.

Blaster Rifle Level 9+ Rare

This item consists of jointed metal rods, a curved metal plate, a hardened leather band, and a pane of glass framed and mounted on the end of a rod.

Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+9	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			

Weapon: Bow
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 fire and necrotic damage per plus

Property

- This weapon requires no ammunition and cannot use ammunition.
- *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you take necrotic damage equal to twice the weapon's level, and you are dazed (save ends).

Attack Power (Necrotic) ✦ **Daily** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); weapon's level + 3 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 necrotic damage, and the target is stunned until the end of your next turn.
Level 14 or 19: 3d8 necrotic damage.
Level 24 or 29: 4d8 necrotic damage.

Attack Power (Fire) ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); weapon's level + 3 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 fire damage.
Level 14 or 19: 3d8 fire damage.
Level 24 or 29: 4d8 fire damage.

Chainsaw Sword

Please be careful with that, especially the edges. This combination of blade and rotating, razor-sharp chain is dangerous to handle without proper training. You see, one of my assistants, a rough, charred-smelling fellow, improperly handled one and lost one of his hands. He didn't let the loss impede his burgeoning adventuring career, however. He attached a *chainsaw sword* to where his hand used to be and wielded another weapon in the other hand. I hear the dear boy has gone off to fight the undead. Of course, you could just choose to hold the device, and keep your hands, but I'm told that's not nearly as "groovy."

Chainsaw Sword Level 4+ Rare

A series of rings and chains line the blade. These chains begin to move on their own after a few pulls of a loose string attached to the hilt.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Weapon: Heavy blade
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Properties

- This weapon deals 1[W] extra damage to undead, and only half damage to constructs.
- *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you take ongoing 10 damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).
  Level 14 or 19: Ongoing 15 damage.
  Level 24 or 29: Ongoing 20 damage.

Attack Power ✦ **Encounter** (No Action)

Trigger: You hit a creature with a melee attack using this weapon.
Effect: The creature takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Level 14 or 19: Ongoing 10 damage.
Level 24 or 29: Ongoing 15 damage.

USING OMEGA TECH

Many *Gamma World*™ Omega Tech items would work well as items recovered from the Barrier Peaks. If you'd like to include some as items in your game using the rules given in this article, here's a quick conversion guide:

- The stability bonus for items is +2 for common ones, +0 for uncommon ones, and -2 for rare ones. (Consult the rarity icon on the item's card.)
- The malfunction effect is the same as the miss effect (if any) but targeted at the user. Otherwise, the GM should invent an appropriate malfunction.

Laser Pistol

I can see you've spotted one of the common items recovered from the Barrier Peaks. Although it looks like a wristband, this device operates much like a crossbow. As you can see, however, it requires neither string nor bolt to use. In some ways, it is close to a common *wand of magic missiles*, only it features what one of my wizards called a "point and click in-their-face." You simply aim this device toward your opponent, click the trigger (just like a crossbow), and energy hits him or her in the face. Simple, no?

Laser Pistol — Level 5+ Rare

This item resembles a heavy wristband that sports two projections. One ends in a black leather grip, the other in a smooth, cone-shaped red jewel.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon: Crossbow
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Property

✦ This weapon requires no ammunition and cannot use ammunition.

✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you instead attack a random target (including yourself) within 5 squares of you.

Attack Power (Fire) ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); weapon's level + 3 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d8 fire damage.

Level 15 or 20: 3d8 fire damage.

Level 25 or 30: 4d8 fire damage.

Needler Pistol

I would not try to drink that if I were you, madam. Its shape might bring to mind a potion vial, but the last customer who attempted to drink from it was quite surprised to find a number of piercings in his head where he did not have them before, and he caused quite a bit of damage to my tent! I hear, however, that upon returning to his country, he kicked off quite a new fashion trend. Now all the nobles are trying to find appropriately sized metal needles to insert into their noses.

Needler Pistol — Level 7+ Rare

This odd device looks like a potion bottle or a flask that is strapped to a number of tubes.

Lvl 7	+2	2,600 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp
Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp			

Weapon: Hand crossbow
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Property

✦ This weapon requires no ammunition and cannot use ammunition.

✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you take damage equal to the weapon's level, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Level 12 or 17: Ongoing 10 damage.
Level 22 or 27: Ongoing 15 damage.

Attack Power ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); weapon's level +3 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Level 12 or 17: 3d8 damage, and ongoing 10 damage.
Level 22 or 27: 4d8 damage, and ongoing 15 damage.

Confusion Ray

Initially, the expedition to the Barrier Peaks assumed that this item, a spinning disk at the end of a pole, was a cutting implement of some kind. The group's elf attempted to use it on a foe. Moments after he flipped the switch on the device, he took off all his clothes, tried to use his bow as a hat, and recited a limerick about Corellon's feet.

Confusion Ray — Level 10+ Rare

A metal pole, about 1 foot long, ends in a spinning, multicolored disk. A switch on the end of the pole controls the spinning rate of the disk, and this switch is warm to the touch.

Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp			

Implement: Wand
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 psychic damage per plus

Property

Malfunction: When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this wand, you are dominated by the target of the attack against whom you rolled the 1 until the end of your next turn.

Attack Power (Charm, Psychic) ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); wand's level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: 2d6 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). Until this effect ends, you can use a free action at the start of each of your turns to slide the target up to 5 squares.
Level 15 or 20: 3d6 psychic damage.
Level 25 or 30: 4d6 psychic damage.

Blue Communicator

You might think that you should put this blue item in your mouth. Do not do so. We have discovered that you should place this piece in your ear. Through it, you can communicate over long distances with someone from your group. You merely have to command it, and it shall put you in touch. You just have to be careful that you're speaking to one of your fellow adventurers, and not accidentally giving something away to one of your foes.

And, seriously, I know it looks like it goes there, but do not stick it in your mouth.

Blue Communicator Level 2 Rare

This glowing blue device resembles a tooth. Do not place it in your mouth.

Head Slot 520 gp

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Minor Action)

Effect: Speak the name of a willing creature within 20 squares of you. Roll a d20. On a result of 2-20, the creature can hear you speak as if you were adjacent to it. This effect lasts until you use this power again.

Malfunction: On a result of 1, you do not speak to the intended creature, but instead speak to a random creature within 20 squares of you.

Jet Pack

This is one of my favorite items. No longer is flame-powered flight the province of dragons alone. This item attaches like a backpack, and it projects flame underneath it to propel you directly upward—perfect for reaching the next slope. I assure you, the first time you try it, you'll squeal with delight as you ascend into the sky, and you won't even miss such things as steering or a way to land. Have I ever tried it? No, I leave that to brave adventurers such as you.

Jet Pack Level 7 Rare

A metallic pack clasps around one's middle, and it projects flame directly underneath the wearer.

Waist Slot 2,600 gp

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Move Action)

Effect: You fly 2d10 squares upward, and then fall.

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on each d10, you fly 1d10 squares in a random direction. You take 2d10 damage and stop moving if you collide with anything.

Gray Security Card

Kzunt has related many stories about the colored doors that separated the various chambers within the Barrier Peaks. Finding different-colored cards that magically opened the doors proved to be critical to exploring the various rooms. This ashen-gray card, recovered from one of the more violent guardian golems, allows access to any door, not simply the ones within the Barrier Peaks. Be careful with this miraculous key because, unlike the keys we are accustomed to, this one can unlock many unlikely things, including the belt you're wearing!

Gray Security Card Level 6 Rare

This gray rectangle resembles a heavy leaded pane of colored glass.

Wondrous Item 1,800 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Standard Action)

Effect: You make a Thievery check to unlock a door or other locked object. The check is made with a +20 power bonus instead of your normal check bonus.

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on this check, all the clothing and armor that you are wearing falls off you.

Wheely Sled

This wheeled platform is activated by using levers on its sides, and these levers also control steering. Our attempts to use it as a new method of conveyance for cargo have not worked out to our satisfaction. For proper operation, one must lie down on the platform to steer it.

One of our enthusiastic dwarf testers attempted to use two at once, one on each foot, with rope attached to both levers to enable steering. After a series of successful rides, the tester decided to add a small ramp to see if the platforms could be used to travel over rivers and other obstacles. Although the jump from the ramp was successful, the tester discovered that such an action causes the steering to lock, and he was propelled him at top speed toward a nearby waterfall. At that point, he discovered that the safety ropes he had tied to himself did not have their intended effect.

Wheely Sled Level 4 Rare

This sheet of solid metal sits on four wheels and is long enough for one person to lie down on it. A number of levers and switches are accessible from the sides.

Wondrous Item 840 gp

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Move Action)

Requirement: You must be lying on the sled.

Effect: Roll a d20. On a result of 2-20, you move up to 10 squares over the ground, ignoring difficult terrain.

Malfunction: On a result of 1, you move 5 squares in a random direction and fall prone in a square adjacent to the sled.

Singularity Grenade

One of the wondrous objects unable to be recovered from the Barrier Peaks was a magic glass that was capable of scrying and answering questions. When the voice within the magic glass was asked to identify this object I now hold before you, the voice referred to the item as a "single larity." We know not what a larity is, or why there is only a single larity and not multiple larities, but we assume that this device summons one to fight for you. We suspect that only one larity is enough to turn the tide of battle.

Singularity Grenade Level 11 Rare

The size of a large fruit, this device is a polished white color, as if made of ivory. In the center is a hole made of pure blackness that seems to spin.

Consumable 350 gp

Attack Power (Cold, Thunder) ✦ **Consumable** (Standard Action)

Attack: Area burst 2d3 - 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Fortitude

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on one or more of the attack rolls, you teleport to the center of the burst, or the nearest unoccupied square, and the attack hits you.

Hit: Roll 1d4. Then roll that many d4s. Then roll that many d4s and total the result. Each target takes cold and thunder damage equal to the result.

Miss: Half damage.

Special: If you score a critical hit with this attack, no damage dice are maximized.

Sleep Grenade

At great expense, we hired a team of goblins to investigate a number of similarly shaped metallic-colored fruits. The first goblin showed us that, under no circumstances, should anyone attempt to eat one of them. The second goblin was instructed to depress a protrusion on the fruit's exterior while holding onto it, and the creature promptly collapsed. The third goblin was ordered to toss the device a safe distance away from itself after activating it. The fourth through seventh determined that the "safe distance" was a much wider area than expected.

Sleep Grenade Level 11 Rare

This device is about the size of a large apple, with indentations all around that are suitable for grasping.

Consumable 350 gp

Attack Power (Charm) ✦ **Consumable** (Standard Action)

Attack: Area burst 2d3 - 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Will.

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this grenade, you fall unconscious (save ends).

Hit: The target is slowed (save ends).

First Failed Saving Throw: The target is instead unconscious (save ends).

About the Author

Dave Chalker is the editor-in-chief of Critical-Hits.com; a freelance game designer who has worked on "Rumble in the Valley" in *Dungeon* 193, "Class Acts: Secrets of the Ninja Assassin" in *Dragon* 404, and "Back Alley Dice Games" in *Dragon* 409, and has served as a developer on *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* from Margaret Weis Productions. Dave would like to thank Gary Gygax for creating *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*, and he is pretty sure that if he had played it with Gary, Dave's character would have been killed while attempting to rescue the innocent-looking bunny.

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The Boston D&D Party

By Shelly Mazzanoble

Illustration by William O'Connor

I just got back from PAX East in Baaaston! What a trip. I got in a fight with a cab driver who tried charging us $7 to get to the restaurant and then $26 to take us back, dined on Dunkin' Donuts (my other favorite D and D) at nearly every meal, and almost got booted out of Newbury Comics with Chris Tulach for giggling and causing a scene over their awesome coffee table books when the staffers clearly wanted to tidy up and go home. Ah, those were good times. Then there was the whole "Three full days of gaming, panels, seminars, more gaming, costumes, demos, sneak previews, industry celebrity sightings, and even more gaming."

Kids these days and their video games.

I always get a little pensive when I attend gaming conventions. Even though I've been going to cons for the last thirteen years, I'm a late bloomer in the gaming world. I don't have a robust catalog of "games played" in my cache. I have yet to master the dexterity required to play an MMO without having thumb cramps for three days afterward. It's still a thrill for me to see the fans dressed up as their favorite characters (A+ job this year) and feel the energy radiating from a standing-room-only crowd before a panel begins. As I wandered around PAX East, I found myself wondering:

- How many man-cations get planned around this event?
- How much caffeine do the attendees consume over the course of the show?
- How is it Dungeons & Dragons® has stayed relevant for nearly forty years?

And that last one is the *big* question.

At least to me it is.

I mean, there we were, smack in the middle of some of the hottest digital games in the history of the universe and yet, the D&D® booth was packed with people looking at, discussing, and drooling in anticipation over our (for the most part) analog product.

For the record, let me say that I still think those rolling logs and crocodile jaws poking out of the blue water in *Pitfall* are some pretty immersive effects, so I'm flat out dazzled at what developers can do these days with some source code and sketch art. Yet our ink-on-paper, zero-points-of-articulation presence at these shows is always met with the same enthusiasm and fervor you usually reserve for an old friend you weren't expecting to see at a party.

Sure there are digital expressions of D&D, and many of them were there showing their wares

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alongside ours. But to most people at PAX East, "D&D" still means the tabletop RPG experience—an experience vastly different from the ones reenacted on the computer, television, and the i-whatever screens that surrounded us.

So really, what is it about D&D that keeps people coming back year after year?

I have a few theories.

Constitution

D&D has legs; it keeps going; it represents a legacy.

I've read plenty of interviews with celebrity-types who credit their youthful time spent combing through dungeons and slaying dragons as being crucial in getting them where they are today. Roleplaying helped them cultivate a love of storytelling, imagination, and creativity. D&D gets thanked more times than the Academy and Mom combined.

You can't shake a joystick at a show like PAX without hitting a gaggle of designers and developers who cut their teeth on D&D. I think it's safe to say that back in the 70s, when D&D first started cropping up in comic book shops and bookstores around the world, there was nothing else like it—nothing even close. And now there's an entire high-tech, multi-billion-dollar industry that grew directly from it.

Without D&D, there might be no PAX—no computer gaming industry, even. Or, at least, they would be nothing like what we know and love today. Their roots run straight back to D&D.

Charisma

Know what my favorite thing to see at a convention is? Gamer parents with their young children. I don't know what it is, but it gets me misty eyed every time.

These moms and dads are so jazzed about sharing their passion with the next generation that they'll plunk down credit card after credit card to outfit their kids with foam swords and wizards robes and superhero capes. The kids will gleefully adorn themselves with said accouterments, but really it's the quality time spent with dad and mom that's the draw.

I understand. I was a kid once too, y'know. My dad and I bonded over sharing his favorite things. The smell of skunks? Check. Body surfing? Check. Beer? Umm . . . check. (Turns out catching your 12-year-old daughter pouring a Heineken into her water glass at family dinner doesn't entirely help with the bonding.)

It's at shows like PAX East that you can see a love of fantasy and gaming take hold, right there in our booth, when a six-year-old comes eye to eye-stalk with an iconic D&D monster for the very first time. Beauty—or at least infatuation—truly *is* in the eye of the beholder.

Wisdom

If you had a parent or sibling or friend or local game shop employee teach you the D&D ropes, consider yourself lucky. Even today, there are a whole lot of people out there who are trying to figure it out on their own, and they come to shows like PAX seeking guidance and wisdom.

How do I know this? Because I was invited to be part of the "How to Start Playing D&D" panel at the show. When I read the invitation, my first inclination was to run to my boss and beg her not to send me to PAX East.

"What's wrong with PAX?" she asked. "I thought you'd want to go so you could eat at Dunkin' Donuts for four days straight."

"I did," I said. "But then I'll have to accept this very nicely worded, yet soul-jarringly terrifying invitation to sit on a panel."

"You know how to start playing D&D," she explained. "You started. And you wrote a whole book about it. Now run along and book your ticket."

Okay fine. I was pretty darned qualified to speak on that particular subject, and by the time the panel rolled around I was almost excited for it. But, really, in my heart I was convinced that with the gazillion other things going on at PAX East, no one would even attend our little panel and I could spend the whole hour talking to Ethan Gilsdorf about the Salem Witch Trials.

But I was wrong.

Really, really wrong.

The room was packed—something like, I don't know, three hundred to four million people—and about half of them had never played a single D&D encounter. What got me wasn't that there was an entire panel dedicated to helping people get started with D&D. What got me was that those people *came*. And they were all ages. And some of them were (*gasp*) women!

So although there were tons of other things these people could do with their tiny slivers of free time (both at PAX and at home), half these people wanted to spend it playing Dungeons & Dragons. And they were in luck because the other half of the room was eager to teach them.

Strength (in Numbers)

When a reporter from a national news outlet came by the booth, we had a nice little chat. She was doing a story about the success of tabletop gaming at digital game conventions. It was downright serendipitous since I was about sixty-three hours into my musings on the very same topic.

Poor girl.

She was probably just looking for a quote. About 45 minutes later, I let her leave but not before expounding on all my theories as to what makes D&D stand out at conventions.

"What do you think draws people to games like Dungeons & Dragons over the flash and frenzy of some of these über-popular video games?" she asked.

"It's social," I said. "Even in this time-crunched era where free time is at a premium, people still want

to be social. D&D provides that along with a much needed release. More importantly (and contrary to the 'nose-constantly-stuck-in-a-smart-phone' visual we've grown accustomed to) people still want that face-to-face interaction."

"Really?" she asked, raising her brows. "Gamers are social creatures? Huh. Who would'a thunk it?" She said this last part with a knowing grin. (She later confessed she's been playing D&D for nearly two decades.)

Isn't it ironic? The game, plagued by stereotypes that make the average outsider believe only kids with social phobias and debilitating shyness would be caught dead playing it, actually attracts the sort of people who like gathering together for social interaction. Don't get me wrong—video games are great. They're highly entertaining. You can play them any time, almost anywhere, with anyone. But there's something extra special about *seeing* the expressions of the people you're gaming with when the hydra leaps out of the chasm after the party totally failed to spot the monster. Or to be able to tell a joke, as opposed to type it. "LOL" just doesn't have quite the same effect as real, honest-to-goodness belly laughter.

Dexterity

Obviously D&D has a long history. Over nearly four decades, and about as many editions, D&D has continued to evolve and stay relevant. Although the specific rules have changed, the basic principals of the tabletop roleplaying game haven't. There's a Dungeon Master and an adventuring party. You tell stories, go on adventures, kill the monsters, and gain the treasure.

Would my beloved *Pitfall* hold up this well if compared to today's video games? Hmm . . . probably not.

It's largely because of D&D's history that its future is such a hot topic of conversation. The "Future of Dungeons & Dragons" panel was packed. Sitting in the audience felt as important as having a seat in a United Nations press conference. Mike and Jeremy were rock stars. I couldn't have been more proud.

I'd already heard everything that they were saying (one of the perks of working here is that I get to insert myself into all sorts of conversations about new ideas and products), and yet as I listened I still felt my heart pounding with optimism and anticipation. I can't imagine what they must have felt like up there, looking out at all of the hopeful faces of people who sincerely and deeply care about what we do all day at work.

Intelligence (or Lack Thereof)

Up until the first day of the show, Katniss Everdeen was my most favoritest fictional heroine. And then I came face to cephalothorax with the notorious Demon Queen of Spiders, Lolth. Did I mention the gigantic sculpture of her we had in our booth? That's right—the Rise of the Underdark campaign kicked off at PAX East.

It's drow mania here in D&D land. Consider yourself warned.

In many ways, D&D is really about the monsters. No, think about it. Beholders. Illithids. Umber hulks. The tarrasque. Orcus. Yeah, we want to kill them and take their treasure, but we love them. I love them. And Lolth is the queen of them all!

I know, I know—Lolth is evil, right? And I personally should despise her, considering what her minions did to me last week in our playtest of the upcoming D&D Encounters® season, *Web of the Spider Queen*. But still I couldn't help but revere her. She was so . . . badass in all her arachnid glory.

Once again I found myself doing what I do whenever I'm faced with potentially deadly creatures that want to kill me—worshiping them. (How does R&D resist them?)

"I love her," I whispered to my co-worker. "She's so cool."

"Ew! Lolth?" Marcy shuddered. "She's nasty! Look at that bulbous butt she has to lug around."

I scoffed. "Whatever. Like you wouldn't take a little extra junk in your trunk in exchange for her abs. Please."

"Well, Lolth is a hater. She even hates you. No matter how much you claim to love her."

"She's misunderstood. I can totally see why she has minions eager to do her evil bidding. I would too. In fact, I wish she would ask me."

"Aw, that's cute," she said, taking four large steps away. "Shelly and Lolth. Sitting in a web. S.P.I.N.N.I.N.G. Have fun with that!"

Unfortunately Chris Lindsay, my Dungeon Master, was standing close enough nearby to overhear. I saw him smiling and doing that stupid, ominous hand-rubbing thing he does. So annoying!

"Oh great. Now what?" I asked.

"You want to do Lolth's bidding?" he smiled. "Ha! Okay. Remember this moment because I'm going to ask you to recount it in about . . . four months."

You've been warned . . . *again*.

While Lolth might not scare me (anymore), Chris sure does.

The point is, we have some of the deadliest, most diabolical, and most demented monsters in the fantasy realm and they come rife with decades of history and backstory. They're yours for the taking. Have at them.

Charm Person

On the flight home, I sat next to a thirteen-year-old girl who was reading *The Hunger Games*. I had to interrupt to tell her how much I love that trilogy and bombard her with my thoughts on the book vs. the movie. (Sorry about ruining the ending for you, little girl!)

She clearly thought I was just some dumb, old lady (probably older than her mom, even) who likes to read kids' books and ruin the endings for everyone she meets, until I happened to mention that I equipped my D&D character with a bow in honor of Katniss.

"D&D?" she asked.

Oh great. Now she was going to ask to be reseated for sure.

"Dungeons & Dragons," I said. "I work for the company that publishes it."

"OMG," she squealed. "I totally want to play D&D! I've been trying to start a club at my school!"

We then spent the next two hours talking about a recruitment plan for new members. When we were leaving the plane, I gave her my card and asked her to keep me posted on how things go with her club. She said she would and that it was "awesome" to meet me.

Awesome. Me! Because of D&D.

Kids these days and their roleplaying games. Talk about awesome.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble got a Katniss Everdeen action figure in her Easter Basket! How awesome is that?

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

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Eye on the Realms

The Talking Door

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Kai Carpenter

The tall, wide, and stout front door of the Inn of the Dripping Dagger in Waterdeep is centuries old, though it has been replaced over the years, board by board and metal plate by metal plate, as various parts of it have worn out. For all this time, it has been an unusually large, but counterweighted and easily opened, front door—nothing more. Now, however, it has begun to whisper short and menacing sentences. Why? What do its cryptic utterances mean? Are they warnings, or are they directions that might lead somewhere? Whose voice is coming from the door? The innkeeper welcomes the new notoriety and the trade it brings, but his wife and daughters want the door silenced—or destroyed. What will happen if they try to destroy it?

The Venue

For over eighty summers, the Inn of the Dripping Dagger (on the east side of the High Road[1]) in Waterdeep's Trades Ward has welcomed adventurers, mercenaries, soldiers, and misfits of all descriptions (from drow, in disguise or out of it, to lepers). Most are visitors, but a few are long-term residents,[2] and all enjoy a spirit of easygoing tolerance, plentiful food and drink, and while-you-wait laundry.[3] The only on-sight exceptions to this "all welcome" policy, aside from individuals who attack other guests, play pranks, or otherwise render themselves unsuitable, is a prohibition on illithids (mind flayers) and undead. Most of the inn staff abhor ghostly apparitions, sounds, and the like. Over the years, several priests have (successfully) been hired to banish minor hauntings of various sorts.[4]

Rowdy behavior at the Dagger is frequent but rarely escalates into widespread brawls or smashed furniture, because no matter how belligerent and strong a misbehaver, someone a few tables away is stronger and utterly fearless—and this person wants the friendly, relatively peaceful atmosphere of the Dagger to continue. In short, the place is a haven for all, and it's neutral ground for rivals—a prized living room far from home. When a young, timid family who mistakenly books rooms at the Dagger shows up, they are treated as family by all the sharpswords with

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their boots up on the tables—not bullied or viewed with suspicion or made to feel unwanted.

All sorts of colorful adventurers' tales describe the Dagger, but to the wider city the inn has always enjoyed a cozy, "wacky" reputation rather than being regarded as unsafe, sinister, or a place of evil.

The nature of the inn's clientele and success have, over the years, led to the Dagger's being filled with rather plain—and scarred—but very sturdy and massive wooden furniture. Its decor is simple, offering few hiding places, and as far as the staff (and the Watch) know, its front door has never been tampered with. The Dagger has for decades enjoyed the unofficial protection of the Watchful Order of Magists & Protectors (Waterdeep's guild for arcane spellcasters) simply by making drinks free for Order members.

All of which makes it highly unlikely that the front door was enchanted by either a guest or a passing spellcaster. Indeed, a paid examination of the door by a senior Order wizard found no trace of magic on the door except for the faint, lingering echoes of a very old preservative spell cast on its wood before it was painted, and fresh traces of the inn's initial attempt to silence the whispering door: a spell cast by a priest whose previous visits had succeeded in ending one of the inn's interior hauntings.[5]

First Utterances

No one is quite sure when the front door of the Dagger began to speak, but it first became a concern the whole staff knew about a little over six tendays ago, when a lady adventurer tried to stride out of the inn at the same time that Phrondra "Eggs" Dorlym, the stout and aging provider of fresh eggs to the Dagger, tried to come in. In the brief moment of confusion as the door stood open and both ladies were retreating to let the other have passage, the door whispered loudly and distinctly, "The third death will come tonight."

That caught everyone's attention. The staff took to gathering and discussing previous utterances by the door, since some of the younger "jacks"[6] were posted at the door to listen and record whatever it said next. By the next day, some facts had become clearer: The door whispered its utterances in the same voice each time, they always held a note of menace or warning or eeriness, and they were always brief—usually a single sentence. Moreover, the sayings that had been remembered and recorded were grounds enough to call the Watch.

No one is quite certain what the door said first, but its oldest known utterance is "His head will be found in a basket on Ship Street."

Family Differences

The current keeper of the Inn of the Dripping Dagger is the Lohthuntle family, formerly of Secomber. The Lohthuntles bought into part ownership of the inn more than a decade ago and are slowly paying off the former proprietors (who still live nearby) and their partners (three other Waterdhavian families), bit by bit, with what can be yielded up of each year's profits. Right now, Randamar Lohthuntle and his wife Systarra own just over thirty percent of the inn, and they very much want to own it free and clear. The Dagger is operating at near capacity all year round, and they see very little possibility of increasing their takings—unless something truly unusual happens.

From Randamar's point of view, something truly unusual *has* happened. Since none of this seems to be dissuading his clientele from staying, he's been playing up all the old stories of hauntings, and adding new rumors about the door perhaps being a divine oracle. He hopes that caravan merchants will spread word far and wide about the talking door. This season, and for long as this windfall lasts, he wants the curious, the devout, and the desperate to come flocking so that he can sell them meals while they gawk. He has twice refused Watch and Watchful Order attempts to have his front door removed and taken away for more private examinations (despite offers of a grander replacement door), because he knows full well that he'll never see it again, and with it will go all the gawkers. He also has a fear of what might happen if the door is tampered with, having had bad dreams about this very thing—nightmares involving huge explosions that maimed his family and destroyed the inn.

Systarra Lohthuntle takes a very different view of the menacingly whispering door, and in this she has three important allies: the hardworking Lohthuntle daughters. The three siblings do much of the daily kitchen and serving work in the Dagger, and they have warmly affectionate personalities that are a large part of why the inn has such a loyal clientele. They all want the door silenced—or destroyed. Yet their fears of what will happen if someone tries to dismantle the door or purge all magic from it are wilder and deeper than Randamar's will ever be, thanks to their far more active imaginations.

So for now, the family is torn . . .

The Watch Is Concerned

The Watch officers who visited the Dagger called on the services of on-duty Watchful Order members immediately, after reading only the first dozen of the door utterances that the inn staff had written down:

- "His head will be found in a basket on Ship Street."
- "After a century, it will awaken hungry."
- "The eels ate him, so look for the ring deep in an eel."
- "The third guardian will begin its slayings in Sea Ward."
- "The insides of two of the suits of armor have been poisoned."
- "He was stabbed by a chandelier, and it still holds his body."[7]

- Of the swords that turn back into serpents when commanded from afar, one is still unaccounted for."
- "They are confident no traitors remain near the throne—but they have missed three."
- "The next burial in the crypt will awaken the dragon that sleeps beneath it."
- "The ship is a transformed monster and will soon be freed when the spells runs out."
- "Blacksunder slew the sixth guild member, but the seventh and eighth killed each other."
- "Two more are still hidden in Undermountain."

At first, some Watch officers were of the opinion that the speaking door was some sort of prank. Either that, or perhaps it was magic cast by an outlander wizard hired by the innkeeper to bring publicity to the Dagger—though the inn is usually full or nearly full, so the need for such an expense seems nonexistent. Others thought it a magical echo of a local temple oracle, or the result of a mage experimenting with a new spell (who is unaware of the door as an unintended effect, or doesn't want to own up to having caused it for a personal reason). None of the clerics or wizards they consulted thought any of these explanations were likely, however. Additionally, at least twelve castings made on the door by both Watchful Order members and hired priests have determined that the door isn't sentient or enchanted by a recent surface spell that causes it to speak. Magic flares within and around the door as it whispers, but the source of that magic remains mysterious. One mage suggested it might be "a localized dimensional leak," but a senior Watch officer warned that this notion is "an attractive one, but also an entirely unproven one."

As word of the talking door spreads across the city, crowds of increasing numbers have taken to loitering near the door. The Dagger does a brisk trade in selling them tankards of ale and hot handpies while they wait to listen for the next whisper.

It's clear from the wording of the door's sayings that at least some of its talk concerns Waterdeep, but the only name in those collated sayings that might mean progress in learning more about the door is "Blacksunder." As far as Watch investigations and Palace record searches can determine, Blacksunder was either a wheelwright whose name was recorded eighty-four years ago (who is presumably dead of old age by now), or a slayer-for-hire briefly active in Waterdeep two summers ago, before he vanished. The Watch is not sure whether the slayer moved on or, more likely, met a violent end while trying to ply his trade. No body has ever turned up, so if he did die at someone's hand, it was done by someone who could hide the body.[8] No less than sixteen city guilds lost members in suspicious circumstances two seasons back, which is when Blacksunder vanished, but the Watch cautions that the number might well be much higher, with some guilds making the deaths seem less violent or suspicious than they were. So scouring the ranks of those sixteen guilds could well fail to isolate a guild that the "Whisperer within the Door" (as some broadcryers have gleefully dubbed the talking entrance to the inn) might be a member of—or might merely know something about.

Investigations (slowly) continue.

The Mystery Solved?

One recent guest of the Dagger has put forward another theory about the whispering door. She discussed her belief with the inn staff and some fellow patrons before reporting it to the Watch, which is how word of it reached the ears of citizens. The Watch has remained silent about it, which has been generally taken to mean it can find no reason to repudiate it.

The guest is Alurantra Belgauntlet, of Darrowmar in Tethyr, an adventurer for hire who spent three seasons as a bodyguard for a traveling priest of Oghma. It is her belief that the door's utterances are the warnings of a Voice, one of a dozen such beings who are servitors of the god Oghma. Either the Voice has "gone rogue," imparting tidbits of knowledge that would otherwise be forgotten or hidden, as warnings to mortals that might save lives, or it is sharing this lore with Oghma's blessing, perhaps as reminders of the daily value of venerating the Binder in fragile mortal lives.

When local Oghmanyte clerics were asked (by private citizens, individually, not by any formal approach by the Watch or anyone else) about Belgauntet's suggestion, they were smilingly noncommittal, saying it could be so, but might not be so. Which, according to general opinion in the Dagger and elsewhere in the streets of Waterdeep, means "The holynoses just don't know."

Notes

1. In Waterdeep, a sure sign of an "outlander" (visitor) is using the term "the High Road," except in formal Palace, court, or guild discussions. To citizens, this street is just "the High," and never anything else.

2. These "seasoners" rent rooms by the season, either for an entire summer or an entire winter or both, paying a lump sum at the beginning of a season to cover their stay for that entire season. Such renters enjoy lower rates, and perpetual residence is allowed. In general (for rental purposes only), a Waterdhavian "summer season" is deemed to begin on the 1st of Tarsakh and end on the last day of Eleint, with winter being the rest of the year, but there's some flexibility, at the Dagger and elsewhere regarding these dates.

3. This led to some rather interesting moments, until the staff made the recent decision to provide a plentiful supply of house robes, which are available to anyone within the inn's walls desiring to don one.
4. These hauntings have included scraping sounds (like a heavy trunk being dragged across the floor),

a dry and smug man's chuckle when no one is there, a silent severed human hand bouncing across the floor before fading away, and, most notably, the silent phantom of a gowned, barefoot, headless woman sprinting frantically down the main passage on the inn's third floor, arms outspread. She passes through anyone and anything in her way, imparting an intense chill. Delicate glass shatters, and most affected mortals fall down, shivering involuntarily, but quickly recover, and thereafter can see keenly in the dark for half a day or so. Then she fades away "through" the end wall. All of these hauntings have been banished successfully with one priest's visit, but the chuckle and the running headless woman have returned (only to be banished again) after a decade or so. The chuckle is the oldest and most persistent haunting; it has come back four times.

5. This haunt-banisher was the capable local cleric "Cleanser" Kleannsur Hortothul, Just Hand of Torm, a calm, methodical, fearless man who looks like a tired old shop clerk. He stares out at the world over his half-moon spectacles, strokes his chin thoughtfully, or trudges to his next mission, and he faces down angry adventurers, marauding monsters, and even demons run amok with the very same weary manner.

6. In the case of the Dagger, "jacks" are youths employed as "fetch-and-carry" servants. They bring things up from the cellars or down from the attics as needed (then put them back again, or store them there in the first place, upon delivery), they do cleaning and scullery chores, and they do laundry. They also work on the roof whenever leaks develop.

7. This is almost certainly a description of a favorite defensive trap in Waterdhavian noble mansions a century ago (many examples survive, and a trickle of new ones are still built today). A floor of large tiles is fitted with pressure-pad triggers (so stepping on the wrong tile, when the trap is set, will depress that tile and set off the trap). Large, heavy chandeliers in that room are equipped with razor-sharp stabbing points among the lamps and held up by greased chains, with trigger-catches in the ceiling. When a catch lets go, its chandelier plummets like a falling stone, to stab whoever set off the trap—and then trips a ratchet mechanism that draws the chandelier back up aloft, resetting the trap. In a few grisly instances, the impaled bodies of trap victims remain stuck on the chandelier, dripping gore slowly to the tiles below.

8. The Watch has recently discovered that certain enterprising Waterdhavians have privately offered to their fellow citizens "burials at sea" that weren't the usual "heart and ashes of a loved one cast from a consecrated boat by holy servants of a deity," but instead involved the disappearances of inconvenient bodies. These bodies are nailed into crates filled with stones, taken out by fishing boats, and surreptitiously dumped overboard when well away from the city. This has apparently been going on as a flourishing business practice for at least six summers, so "vanishing" a body recently became easy, for those with funds enough to pay for this sort of disposal. This evidently replaces the old "shipment for Skullport" method of disposing of suspicious remains.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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DARK SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

Vaults of the Father and Master

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Mark Winters

The sorcerer-kings of Athas maintain their own private storehouses of treasure and magic. Each sorcerer-king keeps his or her most valuable possessions, from magic items to the secrets of immortality, under tight lock and key.

For these despots, security is essential, and not only to prevent their secrets from slipping into the hands of their subjects. Far worse is the risk of a rival sorcerer-king discovering the secrets behind another sorcerer-king's power. For this reason, powerful wards and dangerous traps guard these storehouses, designed to fend off intruders powerful and creative enough to find these caches in the first place.

Perhaps no storehouse of the sorcerer-kings is more closely guarded than the Vaults of the Father and Master, the secret treasure chambers of Tectuktitlay, ruler of the city-state of Draj. It is said that rather than keeping all his secrets in a single secure location, Tectuktitlay spreads lore and magic across numerous warded vaults throughout Draj, each one guarded by the deadliest traps imaginable.

According to information uncovered by Veiled Alliance agents who successfully infiltrated the ranks of Draj's templars, Tectuktitlay created his vaults by summoning to him the greatest masters of magic, psionics, and invention that could be found within his city. In addition, squads of templars were dispatched to other city-states to kidnap architects, sorcerers, and trapsmiths deemed worthy of Tectuktitlay's service.

As a result of these labors, the Vaults of the Father and Master are among the most heavily and creatively guarded treasure caches on Athas. Tectuktitlay had all those who worked on the vaults executed, with many forced to become test subjects for the traps they designed, at least according to rumor. As a result, no one truly knows the full extent of the dangers to be found in these hoards. Presented here are three examples of traps spoken of by thieves and loremasters who claim knowledge of the Vaults of the Father and Master. Many more varieties of traps can be found in the vaults, some of which might be even more deadly than those presented here.

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Tectuktitlay's Narrows

Designed to keep even the hardiest thieves and plunderers out of the Vaults of the Father and Master, Tectuktitlay's Narrows is a physical trap augmented by magic. The trap consists of a corridor 50 feet long, 5 feet wide, and 10 feet high. Each square in the corridor has a spear to attack it.

The Narrows functions much like a typical spear gauntlet trap. When a creature enters the trap's area, the trap attacks with spears that stab out from the walls. Sharpened to a razor-fine edge, the spears of the Narrows have been known to punch through victims and hold them fast, preventing escape. Additionally, unlike those in a typical spear gauntlet, the spears in the Narrows are tipped with stones taken from the Dragon's Altar, an area of such great defilement that the rocks themselves are tainted.

Tectuktitlay has imbued the area of the trap with powerful magic, so that creatures in the Narrows are slowed as though moving through water. These spells make the spear tips crackle with necrotic energy, and also fuel deadly harpoons that seek out escaping creatures and reel them back in.

Tectuktitlay's Narrows **Level 17 Elite Trap**
Object XP 3,200

Detect Perception DC 31 **Initiative** +15
HP 20 per spear square, 20 harpoon
AC 31, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 29, **Will** –
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage

Traits

Sluggish Movement
Creatures in the trap's 1-by-10-square area are slowed.

Standard Actions

Defiler Stone Spears (poison, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +22 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and ongoing 10 poison and necrotic damage (save ends). If the trap scores a critical hit, the target is also restrained (save ends). When the restrained effect ends, the target takes 2d8 + 6 damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Triggered Actions

Harpoon ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: A creature that started its turn in the area of the trap ends its turn outside the area of the trap.
Attack: Ranged 10 (the triggering creature); +22 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 5 damage, and the trap pulls the target up to 10 squares toward the center of the trap's area.

Countermeasures

- ✦ **Destroy Harpoon:** Thievery DC 31 (standard action). from one of the two centermost squares in the trap's area. *Success:* The trap can no longer use *harpoon*.
- ✦ **Destroy Spears:** Thievery DC 31 (standard action). *Success:* The trap loses the ability to use *defiler stone spears* against 1 square in or adjacent to the character's space. *Failure (26 or lower):* The trap uses *defiler stone spears* against the character.
- ✦ **Delay Spears:** Thievery DC 23 (standard action). *Success:* The trap cannot use *defiler stone spears* until the end of the character's next turn. *Failure (18 or lower):* The trap uses *defiler stone spears* against the character.
- ✦ **Dodge:** Athletics DC 23 (standard action). *Success:* Until the end of the character's next turn, as long as the character remains in his or her current space, the trap cannot attack the character.
- ✦ **Predict:** Insight DC 23 (free action). *Success:* The character gains a +5 bonus to AC against the trap until the end of his or her next turn.

Tectuktitlay's Observer

A particularly insidious trap that shows off the cruelty of its creator, Tectuktitlay's Observer destroys intruders in both body and mind. The trap appears as a section of tiles on the floor that have been etched with a variety of runes. Typically, the area of the trap is 25 feet by 25 feet (a burst 2).

These runes contain a powerful psionic trap that tears an intruder's mind from its body. The victim's intangible consciousness is left intact, forced to watch and feel powerful jets of flame destroy its mortal form. Even creatures that manage to escape from the trap are left psychologically scarred by the experience.

This trap targets only a single creature, but Tectuktitlay has scattered dozens of Observers around the Vaults of the Father and Master. Each is visually distinct, so that would-be thieves who encounter the trap are less likely to notice it the next time.

Tectuktitlay's Slow Death

Tectuktitlay takes great delight in ensuring that those who challenge him experience unparalleled agony before the end. Tectuktitlay's Slow Death is one of the most insidious traps in the Vaults of the Father and Master; it can drag an invader's demise out over a period of days.

The Slow Death trap is typically an area 55 feet on a side (a burst 5) covered in a fine layer of sand. This sand contains the arcane essence of a complex petrification spell of Tectuktitlay's own design. When the trap is triggered, its victim is placed into a magically induced state of suspended animation.

The victim loses the ability to move or act, but its mind still perceives the passage of time and what is happening to it. A second spell (an insidiously customized version of the wizard's *disintegrate*) then begins to slowly eat away at the creature's body. The hapless victim is consumed day by slow day, aware of its fate but powerless to free itself.

Tectuktitlay's Observer **Level 19 Trap**
Object XP 2,400

Detect Perception DC 24 **Initiative** –
HP 170
AC 33, **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 31, **Will** –
Immune fire, force, necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage

Triggered Actions

Mind Extraction (fire, force, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: A creature enters the trap's 5-by-5-square area.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 2 centered on the trap's central square (the triggering creature); the target is stunned and immune to attacks that target Will (save ends). When this effect ends, the target takes 4d12 + 3 psychic damage. Until the target leaves the trap's area, at the start of each of the target's turns, the trap makes the following attack.
Attack: Close burst 2 centered on the trap's center (the triggering creature); +22 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d12 + 3 fire and force damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Countermeasures

✦ **Delay:** Endurance DC 24 (free action when the trap is triggered). *Requirement:* Only the triggering creature can delay the trap. *Success:* Until the start of the triggering creature's next turn, it does not suffer the trap's effect.
✦ **Destroy:** Arcana DC 33 (standard action). *Success:* The trap is destroyed. *Failure (28 or lower):* The trap pulls the character up to 4 squares into the trap's area.
✦ **Disable:** Arcana DC 24 (standard action). *Success:* One creature can pass through the trap's area without triggering the trap.

Tectuktitlay's Slow Death **Level 18 Trap**
Object XP 2,000

Detect Perception DC 23 **Initiative** –
HP 160
AC 32, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 30, **Will** –
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage

Triggered Actions

Suspend Animation ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: A creature enters the trap's 11-by-11-square area.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 5 centered on the trap's central square (the triggering creature); the target is stunned (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is instead petrified (no saving throw). Every 24 hours, the target takes 40 damage.

Countermeasures

✦ **Delay:** Endurance DC 23 (free action when the trap is triggered). *Requirement:* Only the triggering creature can delay the trap. *Success:* The *First Failed Saving Throw* effect instead becomes a *Second Failed Saving Throw* effect for that creature.
✦ **Destroy:** Arcana DC 32 (standard action). *Success:* The trap is destroyed. *Failure (27 or lower):* The trap pulls the character up to 4 squares into the trap's area.
✦ **Disable:** Arcana DC 23 (standard action). *Success:* One creature can pass through the trap's area without triggering the trap.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an advanced designer for Dungeons & Dragons® R&D at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the D&D game include the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting* and the *Dark Sun® Creature Catalog*™, *Monster Vault*™, *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™, and *Lords of Waterdeep*™.

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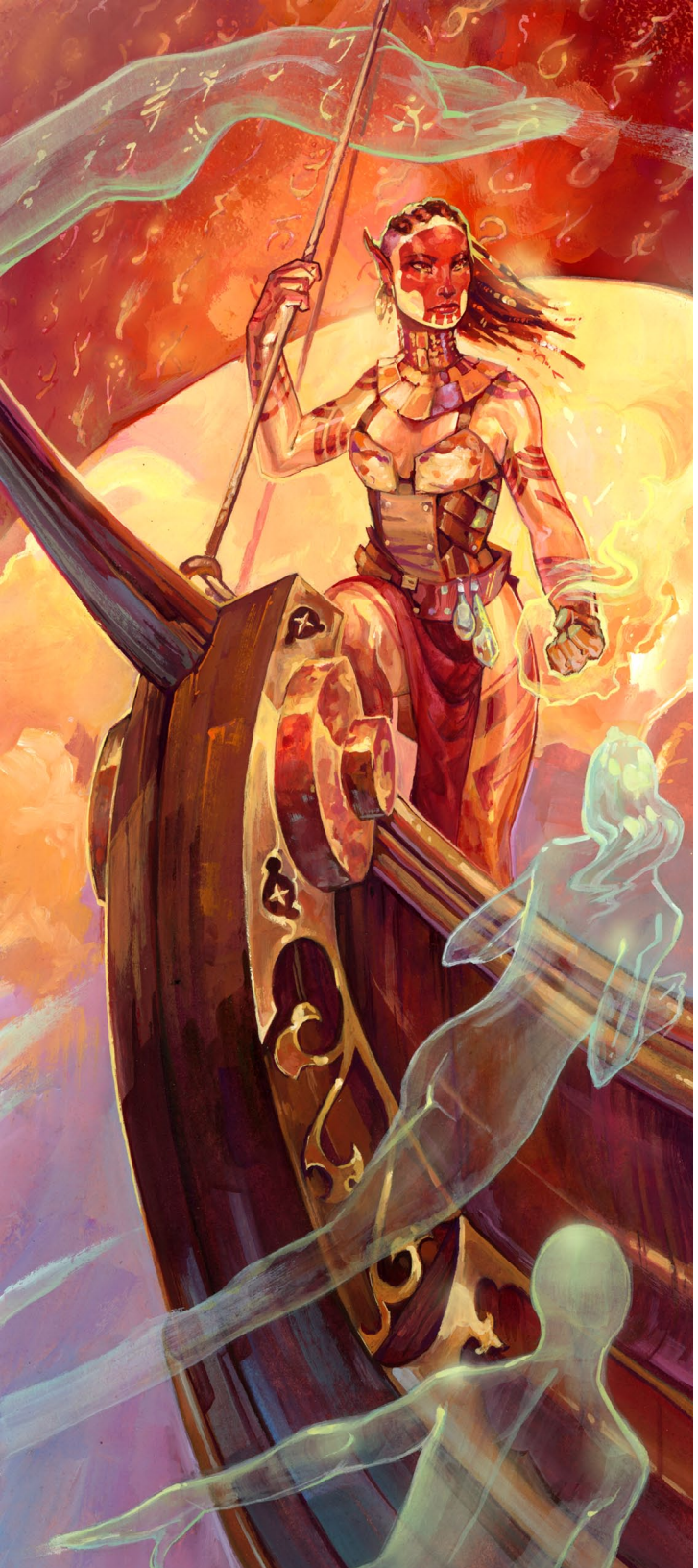

EBERRON

Eye on Eberron

The Bloodsail Principality

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Kai Carpenter

Don't think we're safe because it's a windless night, boy. They've come before on calmer nights than this, their sails filled with hosts of howling spirits. Perhaps they'll send one of their fleshless beasts to shatter our boat from below. If you're lucky, the serpent'll grind you between its teeth, and your body'll be lost. Otherwise you'll end your days as a skeleton bound to an oar in the depths of a Bloodsail ship.

—Captain Dorga Hass

The ship is a shadow in the night, its darkwood hull all but invisible against the water. It is the sail that draws the eye. The black silk is adorned with a hundred crimson sigils, each burning with pale light. The sea is calm, but a groaning wind fills the sails. If you make your living on the Bitter Sea, you know what that vessel is. If you're lucky, it's a merchant vessel carrying the strange spices and other goods of Farlnen. If not, you'd be wise to make your peace with the Sovereigns. The Bloodsails are known to take prisoners, but they rarely take them alive.

Haunted by the Past

Ask any pirate in Regalport, and you'll hear that the Bloodsails got their name from dyeing their sails with the blood of their enemies. This story is a good example of how little people know about the elves—that after thousands of years, they still don't know that the blood on the sails is that of the elves themselves. The people of Farlnen are descended from exiles, elves driven from Aerenal in the wake of the war that destroyed the line of Vol. Although few in number, they are a force to be reckoned with. Even the Cloudreavers know better than to challenge a Bloodsail merchant, and few captains will risk their ships in Death's Finger Channel unless accompanied by an envoy from Farlnen. Anyone who passes an hour in a tavern in Port Verge will learn that every Bloodsail ship is haunted, the waters around Farlnen are home to zombie krakens and undead serpents, Prince Shaen Tasil is merely a puppet of ancient vampire

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lords, and the elf merchants are primarily interested in purchasing casks of fresh blood. As wild as these tales are, almost all of them are grounded in reality.

The Black Isle

Farlnen is cold and bleak, with cliffs of basalt and beaches covered with black sand. When the elves came to the island, they found almost no vegetation; Farlnen is close to the plane of Mabar, and full sunlight never reaches its stony soil. The Grim Lord Varonaen overcame this challenge, and the fruits of his labors can be seen today: darkwood trees and ebon sedge grass that feed on shadows instead of sunlight. Varonaen has continued his work over the course of generations, and the merchants of Farlnen trade spices and wines that cannot be produced anywhere else in the world.

The waters around the island are just as dangerous as the stories say. Basalt columns and treacherous reefs pose inanimate threats to those who don't know the coastline, and the undead sentinels pose an even greater threat. Anything that roamed the water over the centuries might have been slain at some point and bound to protect Farlnen. Krakens? Dragon turtles? Worse? It's up to you to decide what lies hidden in the dark water.

The Faces of Farlnen

Farlnen is a dark reflection of Aerenal. The cities are made of basalt and darkwood, and the sun never pierces the Mabaran haze that hangs over the island. Most of the elves who reside there have pale complexions, as one might expect in such a sunless land. However, children conceived when Mabar is close are sometimes born with jet-black skin; such elves can be mistaken for drow. Tattoos are used both aesthetically and as a sign of status. At a glance, Bloodsail facial tattoos are similar to the death mask designs employed by the Aereni, though the Bloodsails favor crimson inks. But to those who know the culture, these tattoos can reveal family line, mystical talent, and the bearer's ship.

Although Bloodsail merchants and privateers are found across the Lhazaar Principalities and the Bitter Sea, strangers receive a cold welcome in Farlnen. Port Cairn is the gateway to the island and the seat of Prince Tasil, but any visitor quickly realizes that the place has few families. It is home to travelers and those who cater to them, but the family estates lie in the interior and the Fingerbone Mountains. Foreigners who want to travel into the interior of Farlnen are treated with suspicion or hostility; it is all but impossible to find a guide unless the traveler is an elf or a follower of the Blood of Vol.

Farlnen is primarily inhabited by elves, along with a handful of eladrin and half-elves. The eladrin arrived eighteen hundred years ago, fleeing a disaster in Thelanis; they have fully embraced the Bloodsail culture and married into elf families. Members of other races might be accepted as guests, but there is no place for humans on the Black Isle.

Life Beyond Death

Much as Aerenal has its living Sibling Kings and the Undying Court, Farlnen has a balance between the living and the dead. The Prince of Farlnen is the living ruler of the isle, and she represents her people in dealings with the other Lhazaar princes. But the true power in Farlnen is an alliance of undead lords and ladies known collectively as the Grim. This shadow court watches the living from estates spread across the Fingerbone Mountains. Only the most accomplished individuals can rise to join the Grim. One must display talent and charisma, learning all that life has to offer before passing to the other side. Although these traditions are similar to those of the Undying Court, the members of the Grim are not as tightly unified as the Deathless and do not share any sort of mystical power.

The lords and ladies of the Grim live in mansions maintained by tithes from the living. Some use their ancient wisdom and mystical power to help their people; others wish to be left to their arcane studies and private pursuits. However, the Grim aren't the only undead in Farlnen. The members decide who is worthy to join their ranks, but any Bloodsail can earn lesser undead immortality by amassing sufficient wealth. This is the reason the Bloodsails take to the seas as pirates, privateers, or merchants. The price of immortality is paid over time, credited to the accounts of sailors even as it fills the vaults of the Grim.

When a sailor dies, the funds in his or her account determine that sailor's final fate. Gifted wizards or clerics can become liches. Wealthy captains sometimes bind their spirits to skeletal sea monsters. Most Bloodsails aspire to become vampires, however, so that they can continue to walk the world after death. The mortal population can sustain only a limited number of vampires, so the cost of this transformation rises with the creation of every new vampire. Because the price to become a vampire is far beyond what any common sailor could hope to acquire, the majority of these elf sailors end up as haunts. Since the necromancers of the Grim can bind ghosts to inanimate objects, they take this task upon themselves and base the outcome of their efforts on how much was in that sailor's account at his or her death. The more expensive forms of the ritual allow the fallen elf to fully manifest as a ghost, as long as it stays close to its anchoring item. The lesser form keeps the spirit conscious, but allows only limited poltergeist activity.

The most common manifestation of this form of spirit binding is in the Bloodsail ships. The cheapest form of immortality for a sailor is being bound to a ship—typically to the sail. The oldest sails are infused with the spirits of generations of sailors. These hosts of the fallen can propel the ship with a speed to rival

any elemental galleon. They can deflect missiles or tear at enemy vessels, and the enchantments woven into the sails make them virtually immune to conventional harm. The powers of the ghosts depend on their numbers, but these spectral allies make the small Bloodsail fleet exceptionally dangerous. Bloodsail vessels that lack haunt allies often have skeleton crews—small complements of mindless undead that can be assigned to oars or other menial tasks.

Although existence as a lesser haunt might seem like a bleak fate, the Bloodsails consider it a blessing. Even a lesser haunt escapes the slow dissolution of Dolurrh. He can stay with his ship and crewmates, and continue to explore the ocean. Although the haunt cannot enjoy some of the same pleasures he did when he lived, he is one with the ship and the ship's other spirits in a way that mortals cannot understand. It's a limited immortality, but it's still an escape from death.

These details give only a taste of the degree to which magic and necromancy affect the lives of the people of Farlnen. The streets are lit with ghost lights. Any family heirloom might hold the spirit of an ancestor, from a chest that opens only for a descendant to a magic blade that whispers to its wielder. Almost all Bloodsail captains are arcane or divine spellcasters, specializing in necromantic rituals. When a Bloodsail captain faces a difficult decision, it's common for her to retreat to her quarters and consult with the spirits of her predecessors.

The Bloodsails and Vol

The religion known as the Blood of Vol is a bastardized version of the beliefs of the elves of Farlnen, and it has grown and changed over the centuries. Bloodsail priests are far more pragmatic than are their Karrnathi counterparts. They shape their divine spells from the raw energy of Mabar, and whereas the Seekers of Atur try to unlock the immortal potential of the Divinity Within, the priests of Port Cairn are content with the simpler immortality of undeath. Nonetheless, the two faiths share some common practices, and followers of the Blood are treated with respect in Farlnen. The Bloodsails sold their services to Karrnath during the Last War, and ever since Kaius III turned away from the faith, Karrnath's shipping and coastline have been the primary targets of Bloodsail raiders.

Despite these intrigues, the Bloodsails are unaware of the existence of Erandis Vol. The Queen of the Dead needs to conceal her identity from the Aereni Deathguard, and only her most trusted allies know her true name. Instead, the people of Farlnen know her as Lady Illmarrow, one of the most powerful and reclusive members of the Grim. She can use this authority to call on her people for aid or fealty, but she generally prefers to keep a low profile and work through agents.

Bloodsail Player Characters

The Bloodsails aren't innately evil, and there's no reason a player character couldn't come from this principality. Consider the following possibilities.

- A young wizard believes that the life of an adventurer will allow him to gather his blood money far more quickly than would serving as a deckhand on a ship. He is loyal to the traditions and beliefs of his people and fully intends to ascend to membership in the Grim. Although he might not sail a ship, he has the instincts of a pirate; he is always searching for profit and might push his allies to ruthless action to gain wealth. If he is a cousin of Prince Shaen Tasil, he could be called upon to represent the principality in diplomatic events after his reputation and level have grown.
- When her ship was destroyed in the Last War, a privateer was the only survivor. Now she is literally haunted by her former shipmates. The ghost of the captain claims that the crew members were betrayed and sent to their doom by a member of the Grim—possibly Lady Illmarrow. The privateer must solve this mystery and avenge her fallen companions, but if she is to face one of the Grim, she must lie low while she gains power and influential allies—perhaps a party of adventurers. Although this character concept would work for any class, it's an interesting layer of color to add to a shaman; rather than spirits of nature, her spirit companions would be the ghosts of her former crew.
- An elf vampire washes ashore with no memory of his past. From his tattoos, it's clear that he comes from the Bloodsail Principality and possibly is a lord of the Grim. But he can't remember what happened, and his skills are those of a 1st-level character. Can he recover his power and memories while working with a group of adventurers? If he does remember his past, will it be welcome news, or must he atone for a legacy of horrors?

Adventure Ideas

The Bloodsails can serve as colorful antagonists if adventurers are traveling through the Lhazaar Principalities or sailing on a Karrnathi vessel. A long-term campaign against the Blood of Vol might bring adventurers into conflict with the Bloodsails as they search for Illmarrow and Erandis Vol. The concepts presented above for player characters could be used as elements in other characters' backgrounds to help drive the story. Below are a few other ways to work the Bloodsail Principality into an adventure or campaign.

- The party acquires a haunted weapon that recognizes one of the player characters (any elf, half-elf, or eladrin) as a distant descendant—generations

removed from Farlnen, but still kin. The ghost blade wants to be carried by the descendant (which could be a problem if another member of the party is better suited to the weapon) and promises to lead the adventurers to hidden treasures in exchange.

- A vampire player character is being hunted by templars of the Silver Flame, and a Bloodsail vessel is the only chance for escape. The Bloodsails respect the undead and could be convinced to help the vampire and his or her friends. Alternatively, Bloodsails could aid a group of adventurers who are attacked by rival pirates—perhaps the start of a beautiful friendship.
- A lord of the Grim needs vast quantities of blood for an experiment. At first, adventurers might encounter merchants who are willing to pay for donations of blood, which are sealed in casks of preserving pine. Then they find a coastal village whose people have been slain and drained to the last child. What is the lord working on? Can the adventurers stop him?
- The Aereni Deathguard plans to open a rift to Irian, the plane of positive energy, on Farlnen—a scheme that could banish the Bloodsail undead. The characters could be an integral part of the plan, helping to acquire the scattered treasures required to construct an eldritch machine and then leading the covert operation to smuggle the device onto the island. On the other hand, the adventurers might have befriended the Bloodsails, in which case they could be working to expose the Deathguard scheme and prevent the destruction of the Grim.

About the Author

Keith Baker is the creator of the Eberron® campaign setting and designer of the card game *Gloom*. Some say that he has been dead for years and is cursed to haunt his laptop until all of his articles have been written, but there is no truth to these rumors. Probably.

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It's Elementary

D&D Alumni

James Maliszewski

I n recent days, players have been immersed in the elements—as stated in February's Heroes of the Elemental Chaos, "one doesn't have to look hard to understand the energy emanating from the Plane Below, filtering into the other planes through the magic of mortals and immortals alike. A fireball spell harnesses elemental flame, and the evocations of druids and shamans tap into a power even greater than the primal magic that controls it."

Since then, elemental powers continued their prominence in the most recent season of D&D Encounters: Elder Elemental Eye. Currently underway, players are working their way through the Sunset Shrine—and deeper in, to the hidden Temple of the Eye.

While the elements are very much on hand, this is D&D Alumni! And we'd be remiss not to look back at the game's earlier versions—and mythical origins—of the elemental planes and their denizens. This month's instalment comes to us courtesy of a writer who can certainly speak to the game's illustrious history: Grognardia.com's James Maliszewski.

A Primer on Elemental Literature and Alchemy

Elementals have been a part of the monstrous menagerie of *Dungeons & Dragons* since the game's premier in 1974. As with many things in the original release, elementals are presented matter of factly and without any explanation on the assumption that gamers already knew what they were. As it turns out, this was probably a pretty good assumption, since—at the time of D&D's appearance—one of the biggest names in fantasy literature was Michael Moorcock. His stories of the doomed albino emperor of Melniboné, Elric, prominently featured elementals and their rulers, such as Kakatal the Fire Lord and Grome the Lord of Earth.

Of course, the idea of elementals is far older than D&D's immediate literary antecedents. They have their genesis in the works of an alchemist born in 16th century Switzerland named Phillip von Hohenheim—better known to history by his pen name, Paracelsus. Basing his ideas on the elements of classical Greek philosophy—earth, air, fire, and water—Paracelsus postulated beings composed of and exemplifying these elements. Earth elementals he called "gnomes," meaning "earth-dweller." Water elementals he called "undines," from the Latin word for "wave." Fire elementals he called "salamanders," because of a

longstanding legend that these amphibians had an affinity for fire. Air elementals he called "sylphs," a word whose origin is unclear.

While Moorcock more or less adopted the nomenclature of Paracelsus without much modification, *Dungeons & Dragons* created its own take on elementals—a process of borrowing and reinventing ideas from mythology, legend, and folklore that's long been a hallmark of D&D… and that's continued as the game has grown and expanded. (A good example of this can be seen in the association of genies and genie-like creatures such as the djinn and efreet with specific elements—a development with only a thin basis in the real world tales from which they were drawn.) Thus over the years, D&D has used Paracelsus' names associated with each type of elemental to describe different creatures, though ones somehow connected to their element of origin. Gnomes became not earth elementals but an "earthy" demihuman race (with mining knowledge and the ability to communicate with burrowing mammals). Sylphs were not air elementals but fey creatures dwelling in aerial places (and who could summon actual air elementals 1/week). Salamanders and undines were more closely associated with the elements, but, even then, they were distinguished from "pure" elementals.

In early *Dungeons & Dragons*, such "pure" elementals (earth, air, fire, and water) were rated according the means used to summon them, with those conjured by spells far more powerful than those called by staffs, for example. The one commonality was that all elementals were *summoned*… but from where? Once again, the game expanded to answer this question, introducing the concept of elemental planes: otherworldly realms inimical (or at least very dangerous) to non-elemental life. For this reason, the elemental planes initially remained mysterious in D&D. But if there's one thing D&D players like it's a good mystery, and so speculation about the elemental planes, their nature, and geography became a regular feature of adventure modules, fanzines, and periodicals such as *Dragon* Magazine, each offering another piece to the puzzle.

ELEMENTALS: There are four types of Elemental: Air, Earth, Fire, and Water. Each will be dealt with separately. There are variations of strength (hit dice) within all four types:

Conjured Elementals	16 Hit Dice
Device* Elementals	12 Hit Dice
Staff Elementals	8 Hit Dice

*Those from medallions, stones, gems, or bracelets.

Regardless of the strength of an Elemental, only one of each type can be brought into existence during any "day". Thus, if a character possessed a device to call up an Air Elemental, but before he could employ it an opponent conjured an Air Elemental, another could not be created until the next day. Only magical weapons/attacks affect Elementals.

To Enter the Elemental Planes

A noteworthy early bit of speculation about the elemental planes appeared in issue #27 of *Dragon* (July 1979) by Jefferson Swycaffer, where he postulated the existence of not four elemental planes but sixteen! The additional twelve planes arose from interactions between the original four (plus the planes of good and evil). Thus, where the elemental plane of water met the planes of air and earth, one finds another elemental plane, a plane of "moisture." There were also planes of heat, cold, pleasure, pain, fertility, barrenness… a truly expansive definition of "elemental." Interestingly, Swycaffer suggested that demons were the elementals of evil and angels the elementals of goodness—ideas then without any basis in the game.

Gary Gygax, D&D's co-creator, wrote in a subsequent issue (#32, December 1979) that he liked many of Swycaffer's broad ideas but disliked their specific implementation. In particular, Gygax felt that ethical/moral concepts such as good and evil do not belong to any treatment of the elemental planes, which, as a whole, were neutral in their disposition. Consequently, he rejected the notion of demons and angels as "elementals" of evil and goodness, respectively, while endorsing the idea of "para-elemental" and "quasi-elemental" planes formed by the interaction of the four primary elemental planes. Indeed, he proposed an extensive re-imagining of all such planes three years later in issue #73, complete with a three-dimensional model readers could build to get a better handle on how it all hung together (which, to give credit where due, was something Swycaffer had done in his own article).

Additional articles by Gygax and others, notably Lenard Lakofka, filled in a few more details about the elemental planes so as to make them more suitable for play rather than leaving them utterly mysterious. It was this concern—suitability for play—that drove subsequent development of the elemental planes. *Dungeons & Dragons* is a game, after all, and its concepts—no matter how outlandish—should serve the purpose of play. The elemental planes as wholly inhospitable didn't serve this purpose very well, and so those original conceptions were modified or clarified in order to make these planes better suited to adventuring (just look at the 1st Edition *Unearthed Arcana*'s druid, able to enter these planes at will).

Certainly the elemental planes remained challenging, as they still operated under different rules than standard D&D worlds; everything, from magic to class abilities to even orienting oneself, worked somewhat awry. To enter an elemental plane was, literally, to enter a new reality, and only the cleverest and most resourceful characters could hope to survive such a journey. Yet that new reality could nevertheless be quantified, and its rules—however bizarre—could be made understandable for the benefit of DMs wanting to introduce these places into their campaigns. Some of their initial mystery may have been lost, it's true, but was replaced by the opportunity to use the elemental planes in ways that weren't possible before.

Gary Gygax himself agreed with this perspective, noting that *Dungeons & Dragons* "is an ongoing game. It offers variety of play and development of characters in a linear direction. Unquestionably, the addition of other planes for adventuring purposes will certainly excite participants, offering them new areas to explore and new challenges."

About the Author

James Maliszewski started roleplaying in the late fall of 1979, when he opened up a copy of the *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set*, which was edited by Dr. J. Eric Holmes and originally purchased for his father. More than thirty years later, he's still playing. He works as a freelance writer and blogs about old school gaming at http://grognardia.blogspot.com.

D&D Outsider:

The Elemental Chaos: Unplugged

Written and Illustrated by Jared von Hindman

When I heard the announcement that *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*™ would be coming out, it struck a chord. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that my brain read it as "Heroes of the Totally Bad Place Full of Demons and Fire that Looks Like Ice but Melts You Like Acid but They're Totally Still Heroes Even Though They Have Demon Blood and/or are Made of Living Blood Rock (Made of Lightning)." But I don't have to tell you that it's safe to assume we all had that moment, right?

Then I saw the cover art featuring a woman being assaulted by a tentacle monster wearing a fur bikini and knew somehow it was Robert Schwalb's fault . . . I mean, I knew I'd find something within those pages you might have overlooked. Like a primordial armed with yeti-tentacles, wearing furry swimwear, who seems—despite his humanoid torso—to hail from a time before nipples.

So climb aboard and let's take a tour of the Elemental Chaos. It's time to move on in no particular order, in honor of being chaotic.

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Cosmology: The Gods Are Jerks

Buckle up, because we can't even get moving until we hammer down the cosmology of the primordials.

Although the concept of the war between the gods and primordials is not new at all, *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos* does a great job in putting some street-level spin on the whole "Dawn War" between the gods and the primordials, something that's core to the 4th Edition universe. What's interesting is that more and more material has been released that pretty much solidifies that a lot of what we've read in *Divine Power*™—or even in the *Player's Handbook*®—has been propaganda from on high. The fact that the pantheon of deities we know and worship are, in reality, just beings of stability who literally stole the whole shebang from its creators—that's something the Church of Bahamut might not want you to know.

I'm a fan of flexible lore (I almost said "modular," but I didn't want to confuse anyone out there counting the days until the D&D® Next playtest). I feel this way for a couple of reasons. Mainly—I'm lazy, and if I want to run a game, I'm comfortable with cherry-picking not just which details I like, but the ones that will matter at the table. We've all shared initiative with a guy who will correct you if you mention you're worshiping a god that's dead now, or who wants to point out that the average genasi in Faerûn is an atheist, so your paladin makes no sense (as if every adventurer gets a newsletter or has access to the Realmslore Wiki). Another reason is that I have faith in my own creativity . . . but I like to use that lore as a touchstone and a resource.

Heroes of the Elemental Chaos goes all out on describing the plight of the primordial, giving context to the cosmology and showing that the world is still suffering from their imprisonment. Well, sort of. After a clique of holier-than-thous imprisoned them for an aeon for having the temerity to want to reign

over the worlds they made, and then infested those worlds with a bunch of fleshy things, the primordials were not happy. Basically, the primordials are ungods—they are the icons of change that just happened to lose the war over creation.

History and the *Player's Handbook* are written by the victors, and there's a reason why those who worship primordials are called "cultists" and not priests. But the "primordial adept" theme shows that people from the Elemental Chaos have just as much right to faith as anyone else. The theme pretty much is the elemental version of a divine priest. Remember, in the Elemental Chaos the people who worship our gods are the "cultists."

The biggest human outpost? It's named the Ninth Bastion because the entirety of the Elemental Chaos has risen up *eight times* to crush the Erathis/Bane cultists who were trying to gain a foothold in the realm.

There's a lot of material here that you might just skim over if you're only into mechanics. But if you're a contrarian like me, you can't help but dig it. Instead of trying to make the Elemental Chaos seem to be a safe place, *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos* fleshes out the details of the suppressed elemental ungods, and focuses on the exceptional lives elemental characters lead while the gods themselves hold the ungods in contempt and are telling lies about them to everyone in the world. Since we're spinning propaganda, and I'm pretty sure Melora is not going to strike me down, let's just throw down some smack.

The Astral Sea still has the corpses of gods and primordials floating in it. (You'd think the gods could afford to do a little housecleaning now and again.)

Remember that it was a god who created the Abyss (by being possessed/attacked by evil creatures who . . . y'know, just look it up. It's crazy and even the "official" lore is spun differently depending on the sourcebook, implying that once you've been disowned by the gods, it's pretty hard to keep track of what really happened to you). Orcus, Dagon, Demogorgon, and the like all were primordials who got corrupted by the power of the Abyss.

Why do I bring this up? The primordials, for the most part, got imprisoned for their crimes. The demon lords? They're still around. The primordials who became demons were the only ones that the gods on the warpath decided to leave alone. How do you think that happened?

Bane: *I think that's the last of the primordial armies. If you look at this map, which is undoubtedly inaccurate since the Elemental Chaos doesn't sit still for cartographers, you'll see there's one cell of our elemental foes that's entrenched pretty deep in something the boys in marketing are calling the "Abyss."*

Kord: *Meh. Let's get a beer. We won.*

Bane: *Have you **seen** the Abyss? Instead of just primordials armed with the power of creation, this pocket of resistance has equipped itself by becoming the stuff of nightmares. Demons! Horrible creatures, the likes of which we have never seen, breeding in mockery of the creatures we put upon the world!*

Kord: *I'm tired. Besides, they're not hurting anyone.*

Bane: *Did you even read the file? Recon says that Orcus is down there. And you do remember Demogorgon, right? You hit him so hard his head split in two? Don't you want to go finish the job?*

Kord: *I'm pretty neutral on the whole thing.*

Bane: *By the overgod, I really do hate you.*

The gods' message to us seems to have been that the primordials were an enemy that had to be crushed—unless they were also demons.

You see, gods need faith and the belief of worshippers, and nothing puts butts in the pews quite like a demon lord. If Pelor lets a demon run rampant in town every once in a while, it reminds people how important the gods are to them. I bet Moradin and Baphomet have a regular poker game together and laugh about this kind of thing.

Not to beat the notion like the undead horse that it is, but let me throw out one more thing for you to ponder: Why do most divine classes give their

servants tools to smite the undead but not demons or, the most obvious choice, elementals?

I smell a conspiracy.

ProTip: Buy a *chaos cloak* when you hit paragon tier. It gives you resist 10 against attacks from all elementals. This includes titans, most giants, demons, ropers, gargoyles, and . . . well, just trust me when I say that there is no creature type out there more common than elemental. Plus, it'll protect you from your allies, who will most likely be elementals too, considering the three hundred and two ways this book lets that happen. Buy yours early—I expect them to be all the rage this summer.

In many cases, the primordials that merely got chained up and locked away for an eternity are the lucky ones. Here's just a casual example: Technically, "Balcoth, the Groaning King" is an unbound primordial. Well, most of him is. Instead of killing him, the gods cut off his head and sealed it in a box, leaving him to wander around, still alive, spewing elemental energy from his head stump.

Re-read that sentence, and then think about the fact that the book says cultists communicate to him by throwing severed heads into a fire.

That's insane.

The book is filled with stuff like this, and that's the real value of *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*. No stats, just narratives for you to use, abuse, and freak people out with. Like the primordial named Atropus that makes undead godling fetuses (don't ask, it's in the book), or the mother of all Hydras that Kord mutilated but left all the wriggling pieces alive.

Charming, right?

The book also introduces something called the "primal ban." It's like a cosmic customs agent. Basically, it is the reason that elementals and demons can't easily spend time in the "real" world. The primal ban weakens them and makes it so that if you hit them with your sword enough, they get banished back to their home dimension. The funny thing is, the primal ban also prevents the gods from walking around Waterdeep and stepping on people.

That's right, both demons and angels are equally unwelcome. Go primal spirits for not choosing sides! It's a minor footnote, but to someone of an elemental nature, it's downright proof the gods aren't welcome in the world.

What? I told you this book is all about seeing it from the other side.

Elemental Crunch—Stays Flakey Even in Milk

So maybe you're not the type of player to spend hours poring over fantastical history and marveling at the deeper meanings hidden there. Maybe you're the kind of player who just wants to know "what's in it for me?" *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos* definitely brings the crunch. But be warned: Everything in this book has a story behind it, and sometimes the plot of a particular mechanic might be a bit overwhelming. But you know my man-love for this, so let's dive in. It's crunch time . . . for a given value of "crunch," obviously.

At first glance, the sha'ir looks like just another build for wizards. Like the witch, a sha'ir gets a free familiar that seems to be the source of his or her power. Upon further inspection, however, there's an insane amount of roleplaying potential here.

One of the reasons I dug the vampire class was that it presented a character who was not necessarily an adventurer by nature. Concepts could include almost anyone who had been stricken by (or sought out) the vampiric curse. Similarly, the sha'ir is basically just a wizard who skipped class but still walked away with a degree.

Every sha'ir gets a gen servant, a familiar that supplies spells. It goes to the Elemental Chaos and serves as a proxy who borrows the power the sha'ir wants to use. What does that mean? Basically, anyone who knows a few magic words and can craft—or just goes to the City of Brass and buys—their own gen servant can become just as powerful a wizard as a graybeard who spent his entire life in a library poring over mystical tomes.

On a practical level, any kind of character can be a sha'ir wizard. All it means is that at some point your character made a deal with some elemental forces or earned a boon from an efreet, and that pays off with arcane mastery.

Does your pirate ship need some extra muscle? Send Rot-Tooth the cook off on an elemental vacation. If he comes back alive, he can pull double duty slinging hash and serving as the ship's battle mage.

As a little girl, did you win the heart of a water spirit that gazed up at you as you looked at your reflection? Boom! Your new lifelong "imaginary friend" knows where to get you a *scorching burst* or *fireball* on the cheap.

It's like someone who only just started playing D&D getting to write for *Dragon*®. Okay, bad example, but any wizard who had to take out a student loan to get a ritual book has a good reason to be upset with the sha'ir.

While we're on the subject, though, who is your gen servant talking to? No DM is going to make you negotiate getting your powers every night because, well, it's not your fault that your class has a narrative imperative built into its powers, but there's a fantastic hook there. Did that spell just do cold damage and stun when it was supposed to be a fire spell that deafened? Maybe you should ask your gen servant where it picked that one up. *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos* talks a lot about how there's so much energy flowing through the realm (almost *too* much) that almost everyone and everything is willing to give some away—for a price.

Except for the primordials. They're both cheap and easy . . . as patrons. Which is good news if you're a primordial warlock, because your patron doesn't care about you enough to know your name, let alone want your soul. From the book: "No negotiation occurs. An offer of one's fealty is all that is needed. This opening of oneself creates a connection, forged between an uncaring patron and an infinitesimal speck."

Primordials don't really care about you, and since they've got nothing to do with all that cosmic power, they really are pretty ambivalent about who they give it to. This means that it's easy to become a primordial warlock, though now that I think about it, the term "warlock" doesn't exactly apply. I mean, you're imbued with the primordial's power and whatnot but, unlike most supreme beings in the D&D world, they don't even pretend to give a crap, let alone make demands of their supplicants.

What does this mean? A local thug that gets smashed on rum one night can wake up with a wicked hangover and a disembodied voice in his mind. That's right, if people can get drunk enough to wake up with a tattoo they never intended to get, a primordial pact can be forged the very same way. I mean, he might not have meant it, but an enthusiastic enough belch can count as "Yes, I will serve you, imprisoned creator of the planet." It's not like Gazra cares that your parental guardian wasn't around, either. Cursed with a voice whispering things in primordial (a language he doesn't understand), the new warlock could be forced to undertake a quest just to figure out which primordial he has to contact to *try* to get released from his unintended pledge. Primordials are cool with mulligans, right?

Nuggets of Elemental Weirdness

I've still got a lot to cover, so let's just whip through some of the weird stuff you might have overlooked while flipping through this book the first time around. I'm going to spend a lot of time talking about themes, but I'll try not to beat the "Oh my Lord, there is a story here" drum too loudly—just assume that it's pretty much going like the backbeat at a pandimensional rave, okay?

The Demon-Spawn: Your mommy or daddy was an abysmal Abyssal parent. The less said about the "pregnancy paragraph" found here, the better. More interesting is the fact that as these characters level, they become more demonic. As written, this means you get horns and scaly skin, but remember, there are lots of different types of demons. Is your pixie the

unholy union of a fairy and an imp? Is your thri-kreen blue because an ice devil bought your brood mother a couple of drinks? Go crazy! Just don't think too hard about the details.

The Moteborn: If ever there was a theme for the interdimensional adventurer, this is it. Whether you're traveling to or hailing from the Elemental Chaos, you get crazy bonuses to everything to do with portals, and a unique danger sense that lets you know when a portal will send you to New Jersey (or the Abyss—whatever).

The Elemental Initiate: Not all the themes involve the Elemental Chaos. This theme, for example, is one that lets pretty much any class learn kung-fu and get a proficiency in ki focuses (not to mention karate chopping down orcs with your bare hands). It's all about keeping the elements in balance—but not acid. That element can go to Hell (which, as it turns out, is part of where the gods live).

The Janissary: I can't say much about this one without going off about narratives and how it implies that sometimes you as the DM should assign your players themes that fit the story. Let me quote the book again: "Being the slave of a genie is far from an unpleasant experience." Yeah, right. It's a "cultural tradition" for the genie-types to enslave people. Nothing awkward there. But once the creatures are enslaved, the genies give them pretty much free rein and a job in the local government or militia. Sure, the dental sucks, and they get a brand or scar marking them as being the property of a city or specific family of lamp-huggers, but the nice thing about being property is that someone else has a vested interest in your well-being. If someone messes with you, he or she risks getting a face full of efreet. Also note that this theme gives you bonuses when socializing with elementals. So to sum up, this is a theme that dictates that you got kidnapped, promoted to middle management, and attended classes in demonic and elemental etiquette.

The Firecrafter: Oh man, I have been looking forward to talking about this one. A friend of mine played a fire genasi rogue at the time that *Martial Power*™ introduced the "intelligent thief" build, for the sophisticated skullduggerist. During the middle of a series of amazing Stealth rolls, I broke the don't-help-the-DM-mess-with-the-party rule and asked, "Isn't your head on FIRE? Isn't it hard to Stealth in the dark when you're glowing? Also, shouldn't that give you at least low-light vision? Your head is on fire as we have this conversation." The firecrafter theme might be the first time I've noticed a power set give a nod to the fact that, while fire can clear a dungeon, it's also the mundane thing shedding light in said dungeon.

Quick Note: The firecrafter is best used by a class that has really good encounter powers, since its big gimmick is swapping those out. Instead of just utilities, you get to relive the *Final Fantasy* experience at your table: casting Fire1, Fire2, or the infamous Fire3! (Also known as *lesser produce flame*, p*roduce flame*, and s*weet Pelor that flame is great*.) Wait. I'm pretty sure D&D came before *Final Fantasy*, but I still can't shake the fun of having access to two spells, each at three different strengths. Fighters?

Your fire marks those it touches. Turning a melee character into a walking flamethrower pushes my buttons in the best pyromaniacal way. Don't forget to be creative—there has to be a reason your character is bound by fire. Want to dust off the "*flame strike* cleric" of yesteryear? Have fun. Want to play a dryad druid whose tree burned to the ground and all that remains is the smoldering spark within her bosom? Well, I don't personally, but it's a damn cool idea. Don't forget that being a firecrafter merely means your character has been touched by elemental energy. You don't have to live a stone's throw from the Abyss to use this theme, or the watershaper theme for that matter.

Speaking of the watershaper, those of you who took *Lair Assault: Talon of Umberlee*™ seriously might have noticed that the only way to get the aquatic keyword on your character was, oddly, to be a half-elf. (There was a feat—don't ask.) *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos* opens that option for everyone, so if you want to get wet, now is your chance. Available in class, familiar, elemental companion, theme, or easy-to-swallow feat form.

Epic Destiny: Emergent Primordial: Do you want to be Huge? According to your spam folder, you do. This destiny lets you become that size and, well, nothing says "I'm epic" more clearly than becoming so large that there are only about four miniatures ever released for D&D minis that are bigger than you.

The Big Chaotic Finale

One of the best things about *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos* is that it's very concerned with making this exotic material approachable. There is a recurring gimmick of showing in-character monologues from elemental characters to help immerse you, and a whole section explaining just how a player character might be stricken/blessed with elemental power. This ranges from getting an elemental patron (pledge just one gold piece a day and help guarantee the future for poor souls such as Cryonax), to primordial shards—elemental relics that transform those who touch them—to just randomly getting imbued with power while walking innocently through the plane (it *is* the dimension of change, after all). There's no end of ways a player can get an excuse to turn a previously ordinary character into a flying sniper (with the windlord theme) or into the envy of all dwarves (earthforger theme).

That's all the time we have for today, boys and girls. Just remember: In the Elemental Chaos, druids don't need trees, monks are made up of 80% *Mortal Kombat* maneuvers, and even millennia-old, insane beings of primordial creation have feelings, too—they just tend to change at random . . . sometimes into ice made of lightning.

—Jared

If you'd like more information about the primordials, please throw the severed head of your enemy into the nearest open flame and the Groaning King will be with you shortly. May the ungods be with you.

About the Author

Jared von Hindman is an artist and sometime comedian who "dug too deep" while researching Stupid Monsters of Dungeons & Dragons®. He awoke something dire and horrible (perhaps fiendish, even), and now spends his days playing with plastic elves and illustrating new and creative ways to kill goblins. Currently, he resides in Berlin. Sometimes he forgets to write his end-of-article bio, and then his editor does it for him.

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